

Wolf Creek Lodge

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Wolf Creek Lodge

by [PragmaticHominid](#), [Pragnificent \(PragmaticHominid\)](#).

Summary

Part II in a trilogy that combines elements of the WRONG TURN film series with characters from HANNIBAL.

Having successfully escaped the clan of mountain cannibals with Will and D in tow, Hannibal seeks to obtain legal custody of the boys. Will and D attempt to adapt to the world beyond the isolation in which they were raised, while all three of them begin to better understand what life together as a family will look like.

Chapter 1

Chapter by [Pragnificent \(PragmaticHominid\)](#)

Chapter Notes

Hi all!

Here we are at the start of Part II of what has become a three part series.

Note before we begin that I'm opting to tag in the author notes at the start of individual chapters rather than in the tags. Feel free to let me know if there is something specific and beyond the obvious that you would like me to tag.

Other than that, I have a quick question for anyone who doesn't mind answering: Did you come to this series as a fan of HANNIBAL or WRONG TURN? You can let me know in the comments or answer this twitter poll: [Link](#).

Thanks everybody,
- Pragg

When Hannibal blacks out, just a couple miles outside of town, it doesn't come as much of a surprise to Will.

Hannibal fell silent shortly after he finished laying out the plan for Will and D, and before he'd even stopped talking Will was aware that his arrow wound was bleeding again, and badly.

He thinks that something must have gotten jarred around or busted when Maynard drove them off the road, but he doesn't ask Hannibal about it. Will just watches, carefully, for the collapse that he has enough experience to see coming.

By the time Hannibal's foot slides off the accelerator and the truck begins to list off the side of the road he is sitting in a lapful of his own blood.

Hannibal's hand reaches for the emergency brake, then drooping like a dying flower falls short, but Will's got it. They weren't going very fast by that point anyway, and when Will pulls the brake the truck shudders to a stop halfway between its proper lane and the shoulder.

Will has a choice then, and with the last strength that he can muster Hannibal turns his head towards Will and lifts his eyes to him to watch as Will makes it.

He could leave Hannibal behind - bundle the still-sleeping D up into his arms and walk away from Hannibal and his careful expressions and his easy way with murder, away from the people-flavored meat sticks and the body cooling in the back of the truck and whatever else might be waiting at the end of the road Hannibal is taking them down, and either try to make it on his own with just D or else find someone more... normal, whatever normal even means, to take them in.

Will doesn't want to do that.

Hannibal might be no less a monster than Will's uncles, but Will is pretty sure he's a safe monster, at as far as D and himself go. And Will, who still has Frederick's dried blood on his hands, can't yet imagine being able to fit in among any of the normal people that he's lured in for death at the hands of his former family.

A monster is what they need.

And Hannibal likes D. Will thinks Hannibal likes him just as much, but the feelings that provokes are more difficult.

So when Will gets out of the truck he does so to flag down help.

Traffic here is sparse by most standards, but a thousand times busier than the road that Will is accustomed to hunting on, and within a few minutes he's spotted an oncoming car.

It feels almost unreal, stepping out into the road without any ulterior motives and waving his arms to stop the vehicle.

It's strange, too, watching the pair of oldtimers get out of their car and thinking what a disappointment it might have been to waylay them only yesterday. The old woman hurries to Will and amid a flurry of questions about what happened and if he is alright and where are his parents she tries to touch Will. He shies away from that, seeing her in his mind's eye, bled out and dismembered in the shed, nothing more than stringy grey meat on brittle bones, and little of it.

"I'm alright," Will says, and then pointing at the truck says, "but Hannibal needs help really bad."

The old man is peering into the truck cab with a worried look on his wrinkled face. When D lifts his head, blinking sleep from his eyes and looking around, the man yelps in surprise and takes a step back, and Will hurries around to the passenger side to haul D down into his arms and hold him close while the oldtimers take out a cellphone and call for help.

There is, before very long, the howling of an ambulance's sirens. Three strangers swarm out of the van and get down to the business of trying to keep Hannibal from dying while Will stands out of the way, trying to keep D from panicking at the wake of so much activity and noise and uncertainty.

It's a small hospital, in the scheme of things, but it's just about the biggest place that Will's ever seen. The light that shines off the floors and the white walls beats against the sides of his skull, making his head swim with pain.

They've already wheeled Hannibal's stretcher halfway down the hallway when one of the strangers lead Will and D through the sliding glass doors marked EMERGENCY in tall red letters, and Will watches Hannibal and his collection of nurses or doctors or whatever they are disappear around the corner, and is torn between the desire to chase after them and the fear that doing so might bring some further calamity down on all of their heads.

The hospital people try to put Will and D in separate rooms with separate beds, but the bright lit little rooms don't have proper walls, just sheets hanging down from the ceiling, and as soon as the adults turn their back on D he ducts under the one dividing the two of them and climbs into bed with Will, who really isn't feeling good now.

The hanging sheet makes a whooshing sound as a pair of nurses enter the room, and Will watches the tall one come up short when she catches sight of D's face, and Will snarls at her in turn even as the woman catches herself and tries to smooth things over.

"Hey, little guy," she says to D as she approaches the bed, speaking with a forced sense of good humor that Will thinks is designed to conceal her own unease, "you're supposed to be in your own room."

"I'm supposed to stay with Will," D counters, and Will remembers, in an alarmingly fuzzy way, Hannibal telling them that it was important that they refuse to consent to leave the hospital without each other or Hannibal. "I *want* to stay with Will."

The nurses trade troubled glances, and Will knows that they didn't understand a word D said to them - that to them it was just noises - and he says, "This is my brother. We need to stay together."

"Okay," the shorter nurse says, and Will can see that she is trying to pacify him but thinks that's just fine. "You can stay together for right now, but after we finish check-in you'll need to go back to your own bed. We'll open the curtain so you can see each other, okay."

"Right now I need you two to change out of your clothes and put these gowns on, alright."

Will takes the cotton shift from her dubiously, and D follows his lead and does the same.

"Take all of your clothes off, everything but your underwear, and put them in that bag over there, okay," the nurse says, and points to the trashcan in the corner that is marked in big bright letters, BIOHAZARD.

Pulling anxiously at the hem of the shirt Will gave him what seems like an impossibly long time ago but which was only yesterday, D asks tentatively, "Will, my tiger shirt too?"

"He wants to keep his shirt," Will tells the nurses. "It's not dirty. It's okay for him to keep it."

The nurse tries to smile at Will, but she can't hold the expression. It flickers on her face, and beneath it there is something that Will can't name, something that he couldn't even begin to put to words but that is in some way akin to both pity and disgust.

It shames Will, and enrages him, and he'd like to jump out of the bed and claw at her face - to tear at her until she doesn't have enough face left to ever look at him or anyone else like that again.

Don't do anything violent, he remembers Hannibal saying, and tangles his fingers together in his lap to keep himself still. *Don't hurt anyone. Will, this is the most important thing; if you hurt anyone, they'll separate you from D. They'll have you arrested, and I'll have a rough time getting you back.*

"Just put it in the bag with the other stuff and we'll figure it out later, okay," she tells Will. "We'll be right outside if you need any help!"

"Will?" D says. "Are you alright?"

"Yeah, everything is okay," Will says, putting forth his best effort to hide all the doubts that are sloshing around inside of him. There are so many people here, and Will does not know how to keep them from running roughshod over him, and that comes with so many bigger implications than a lost t-shirt.

"Let's just do what they want and then we can go and find Hannibal," Will says, but when he slides off the bed to stand so he can change the world begins to swim and stutter around him again, and he drops the hospital gown on the floor and brings his hands up to the sides of his skull, biting back the need to whimper - to scream maybe - at the pain inside his head.

"Will?" D asks, and then more frantically as Will slides bonelessly to the floor, " *Will!* "

As though from underwater Will hears D cry out, "Help! Hannibal, help!" and he tries to say that it's alright, that he just needs to sleep this headache off, but he doesn't know for sure if he really said these things out loud or just thought them, but if he did then neither D or the hospital people pay him any mind, because now there is a flurry of activity surrounding him.

Things come to Will in blurry, disconnected pieces after that.

There is the sensation of being picked up by someone much bigger than himself, and Will looks up at the face above him and tries to decide if it is Jed or Hannibal or someone other, but his eyes will not focus on the face floating up there so far away, so he gives it up for a bad job and closes his eyes against the probing of the hoard of hands that seem to surround him as soon as he's put down.

Against his will someone peels back an eyelid and shines a blindly bright light into his eye, then moves on to do the same to his other eye, and at the same time someone is washing the dried blood from his face and giving the gash in his forehead, which stopped bleeding some time ago, a closer look. Somebody mutters, "Christ, he's got lice!" and another voice replies tiredly, "What did you expect?" and behind all of that Will can hear D whimpering.

Will turns his head towards that last sound, and opening his eyes is able to focus, briefly and woozily, on his brother, who has retreated to the other bed and who is watching him with wide eyes from the other side of the open curtain.

“It’s okay,” Will tries to tell him, but then they are rolling, the chair he was sitting in gliding over the glaringly bright floor at dizzying speed, and it takes Will perhaps half a minute to be able to say to himself, *I’m in a wheelchair now*.

Will doesn’t understand most of the things that happen to him after that - the x-rays and the examinations and the inserting of an IV into his arm and stitches into his forehead, but somehow he is back in bed and D is standing beside him, gripping Will’s hand between both of his own, and Will tries to tell D that he thinks maybe he saw one of the oldtimers from earlier in the hallway, but D shushes him goes on staring at something above and beyond Will, and Will turns his head towards the droning of a voice that he’s only just noticed, and manages to make his mouth say, “What?” in response to the man in the white jacket who is standing over his bed.

The man smiles down at him in a way that Will imagines is meant to be reassuring, and says again, “You have a minor skull fracture and a concussion. We’ve given you some medicine that will help but that will probably make you very drowsy very soon.

“Your father is in surgery and will...” but before he can try to figure out what that means or hear the rest Will falls asleep.

Chapter 2

Chapter by [PragmaticHominid](#)

Will wakes up in a strange bed in a strange room.

D is sitting next to the bed in a big brown leather chair, kicking his dangling feet idly while he stares up at the TV bolted to the wall, and eyes drawn to the motion Will sees that D is wearing new shoes - new everything, point of fact, head to foot.

When Will moves to sit up in bed, D cries, “Will!” and bounces to his feet, the cartoons moving across the bright screen forgotten.

Those cartoons unnerve Will.

He and D have watched videos together on stolen laptops and cellphones, and the uncles had an ancient VHS-TV hybrid that they would sometimes dig up to play a movie, but never has a cartoon looked as bright and fantastical yet nauseatingly real as they do now.

The walls around him are no better. They’ve been painted a dizzying array of vibrant colors that make Will’s still-aching head pound just from trying to look at them.

The window is a source of relief. It’s dark on the other side of it, quiet and cool-looking, something apart from the bright lights and chemical smells of this room, and Will focuses on it until he feels more clear-headed.

“Where’s Hannibal?” he asks, sitting up a little straighter.

When Will moves he feels the pull of bandage tape against the back of his hand and a faint sting, reminding him of the IV needle that is still under his skin. Will doesn’t like that, so he pulls it out.

“He’s upstairs in his own room. That old man took me up to see him, and I guess he’s doing alright.”

“What old man?”

“The one from the car.”

Will says, “I thought I saw one of them in the halls earlier, but I wasn’t sure. I’d figured they went on their way.”

“He said that they wanted to come back here and see if we were alright.”

“Yeah?”

“They mostly just sat around and waited with me until the nurses let me in here,” D says, vaguely uneasy from something in Will’s tone and trying to pacify him. “Then after a little

while they decided that the woman should go to the store and get us some stuff...”

D raises his arm to point at a plastic bag sitting on the counter by the sink. “That’s for you.”

“What did they want?”

“Dunno,” D says, on the verge of sounding troubled. “The man mostly wanted to talk to Hannibal, and was waiting around until the nurses would let him. He was mad at him - the man was mad at Hannibal, I mean.

“Hannibal let him be mad, for a little while, and he told him that he was right to feel that way but that his target was wrong. He said...”

D sputters to a stop, fidgeting his hands and struggling to parse a conversation that Will doubts he could fully follow, but then he goes on. “I guess it boiled down to is that Hannibal said that he wasn’t our daddy or any kind of kin to us, but that he was working on taking responsibility for you and me.

“Hannibal talked at him for a while, and the man calmed down, and after that the old folks left, and Hannibal talked the nurses into letting me come up here and sit with you.”

Will wants to say, *Good. I’m glad they’re gone*, but bites back on the impulse. Whatever instinct drove those strangers is too foreign for Will to trust, but he thinks maybe that has more to do with himself than the oldtimers, and he doesn’t want his own bitter suspicions to sour the thing for D.

Instead, he keeps his voice as neutral as he can when he asks. “They treated you alright?”

“The man was really nice,” D says, and Will remembers watching the way the oldtimer jumped when he saw D look out the truck window at him. “I couldn’t tell with the woman... It felt like I worried her.

“But there was something I noticed,” he goes on, and now the worry is plain in him. “They didn’t understand me when I talked.

“Nobody here does, Will,” he goes on. “They just look at me, and they blink, and then they either try to guess at what they think I want or tell me to go sit down.”

Beneath the quilt, Will’s hands ball together, squeezing like they’re closed around an invisible neck.

“The problem is that they aren’t listening right,” Will tells him. Then he adds quickly, “I want to go see Hannibal. Where is he?”

D brightens, pleased at the prospect. “I’ll show you.”

Will skirts around the shopping bag the oldtimers left behind like it’s a snake that might bite him, but when D glances back and sees that Will hasn’t brought it along he frowns and darts back into the room to tuck it under his arm before zipping out again.

The gleaming floors cold under his bare feet, Will follows him down the empty hallway.

D leads Will down quiet halls that were so crowded earlier that day, pleased by his own daring and eager to show Will how much he's learned, and when they step onto the elevator he proudly pushes the button to take them up to Hannibal's room. He laughs at the surprised look on Will's face as they start to rise, even as his own stomach lurches giddily.

Then they are in the hallways again, D matching his pace to Will's as his brother, as though expecting ambush, keeps low and cleaves to the walls.

"He's up there," D whispers, deferring to Will's caution, and because they are coming up on the closed door so quietly they hear the strange voice coming from the other side.

Hannibal says something that D can't make out, then the door swings open and a man steps into the hallway, and D has just enough time to register his blue uniform before Will jerks him through the bathroom door and out of sight.

D tries to say something, and Will hushes him sharply.

"That was a cop," Will says, and D sees the fear shining in his glassy eyes.

It's not the first cop D has seen today, and he reminds Will, "Hannibal said that he'd have to talk to the police. He said that wasn't something that he could help."

"I know it," Will says. "I guess I knew that, but I got scared."

"Do you think we're going to have to talk to the police too?"

"Dunno," Will says, peeking out the door to see if it's safe.

D stretches to look over Will, and through the cracked door he sees the cop retreating down the hallway. The man moves like someone who's been worn ragged, and there's a smear of blood across the back of his uniform.

The cop rounds the corner, and Will says, "Let's go."

Chapter 3

Chapter by [PragmaticHominid](#)

Hannibal is busy reading over a stack of papers when the boys slip into his room.

He'd been perched on the edge of his bed, but now he stands to greet them. "My discharge papers," he says, gesturing with the pages. "And yours as well, Will. I was just on my way down to get you. We're leaving momentarily."

Will gives him a hard, studying look. "Are you well enough for that?"

"My doctor expressed a similar skepticism," Hannibal answers. "I'm well enough, Will."

"What was that cop doing in here?"

"It's a good thing you missed him - he's had a dreadful day, I'm afraid, and is in an absolutely awful mood."

Will listens closely as Hannibal explains how he spoke with the police as soon as he was out of surgery and lucid enough to do so, as he'd already warned the boys he would have to do, telling them about the body in the back of the abandoned pickup and spinning a carefully curated version of what happened on the mountain.

"I almost felt bad, sending the officer who spoke with me up there," Hannibal goes on. "He and his colleagues walked headfirst into a bloodbath, and I don't mean just what Wasco did to them. When they start to count the bodies up there this is going to be an international scandal."

There's a lot about that to make Will anxious, but before he can think through it Hannibal adds, "I'm afraid they got your uncle, Will."

"He's dead too now," Will says, and when D's breath hitches and he reaches for Will's hand Will clutches on too. "I figured it would go that way."

"Oh no," Hannibal says. "They took Wasco alive."

"The man you saw in the halls was the partner of the individual I spoke to earlier. The latter didn't make it, I'm afraid, nor did three of his colleagues. It seems your uncle put up quite the fight."

There's pride in that for Will, despite everything, but it doesn't drown out the fear.

"Are they going to hurt him?"

"They may, but probably not to the extent that he and his brothers hurt others. And down the road we might be able to do something to improve his situation."

Placing all of this to the side, Hannibal continues, "I've spoken to my lawyer and the state child protective services as well."

"And?"

"The CPS is woefully underfunded and understaffed, while my lawyer suffers no such disadvantages, should we encounter any roadblocks. But once I laid out my credentials and voiced my personal investment in your situation, the woman I spoke with was very encouraging."

"It's going to be a process - there will be meetings, court hearings, and doubtless mountains of paperwork - but I think it will work out in the end, and for the time being I have you both through the weekend."

Hannibal rests on the edge of the hospital bed while on the other side of the bathroom door Will changes into the set of clothes that the elderly couple bought for them.

Will grumbles something, but the only part of the sentence that Hannibal can make out is an emphatic curse.

"You alright in there?" Hannibal calls out, just loudly enough to be heard from behind the door.

"Fine," Will says, but shortly. He didn't want to take the clothing the elderly couple bought for him, Hannibal knows, though he isn't sure if Will is offended by what he might perceive as charity or if they did something more specific to invoke his ire.

"I hope those nice people left their contact information," Hannibal goes on. "I'd like to send them a thank you gift, in the very least, for saving my life."

"I saved your life," Will says, the anger in his voice barely muffled through the plywood door. "Me and D and Wasco saved you. Those two just showed up at the end, after it was all but over."

The bathroom door might have slammed against the wall if not for the benefit of the door stopper. Instead, the door swings back hard and hits Will in the shoulder, provoking a yelp that is more frustrated surprise than pain.

"None of this fits!" he says, walking with evident discomfort towards Hannibal, the new set of shoes held in one hand, and Will is right about that, of course. Even as stick-thin as the boy is, the jeans, the legs of which stop short of Will's ankles, clearly pinch, and the shirt isn't much better. It's so tight that it's limiting the range of motion around his shoulders, and it started to hitch up just from the short walk from the bathroom to the bed. Will jerks the hem down angrily.

“They envisioned you as being smaller than you actually are,” Hannibal tells him. “That’s inconvenient now, but in the larger picture not necessarily a disadvantage.”

“I can’t even get these shoes on my feet,” Will says, and the outrage in his voice is beginning to take on a whining tone that reflects his age, “and the jeans are making my belly hurt.”

Most of this, Hannibal knows, has nothing to do with the ill-fitting outfit; Will is on the edge of a breakdown, probably one of many. More tears will be a necessary step if Will is to even begin to process everything that has happened to him and that he has seen happen and that he has done, but Hannibal is himself feeling less solid on his feet than he has pretended, and for now he tries to forestall them.

“Never mind,” he tells Will. “A driver is waiting for us in the parking lot. Once we’re on our way I’ll order a few things that fit you better and have them delivered to the hotel directly.”

Chapter 4

Chapter by [PragmaticHominid](#)

To say that the hotel is the very best that the area has to offer is, Hannibal feels, the epitome of damning with faint praise, but despite his own discontent with their lodgings he is aware of how the place's counterfeit opulence overwhelms the boys, and so he shepherds them through the halls and into their own suite as quickly as he himself can manage.

They stand in the center of the small kitchen, looking around dazedly, while Hannibal goes to the refrigerator and peers inside before moving on to look inside the shopping bags sitting on the table. He's pleased to find that everything he ordered is there.

When he turns his attention back to Will and D they are still frozen in place - seem, in fact, to be afraid to move - but at last D ventures, "Is this where you live?"

"No," Hannibal says. "We'll just be staying here until certain legal issues have been sorted out.

"It's fine for you both to look around," he assures them, "but in a few minutes I want you to shower, and then we will need to take care of the lice situation."

He adds, "Your room is through the living room and to the right."

They venture forth, D tugging at Will's hand to hurry, and disappear around the corner, and when Hannibal hears D say excitedly, "Is that candy?" he knows that they've found the mints left on their pillows.

"Looks like it," Will answers.

"Can we have it?"

"Sure," Will says, but a bit nervously, like he's anxious that he's giving away something that wasn't meant for them.

When Will and D find Hannibal again he's moved into the bathroom, and is laying out clean changes of clothing for the both of them on the sink countertop.

Along the edge of the tub he's lined up a regiment of bottles and bars, and D tries to pay close attention as Hannibal tells them what each one is for, the bar soap and the tea tree oil body wash and the shampoo, but beside him Will is getting impatient.

When he picks up a lime-green bar of soap and a small metal thing with a hooked end and explains, “This is lava soap. It’s for your hands only, but use it and the nail pick to get everything out from under your nails. Will, I especially want you to be careful to -”

“We know how to use a shower,” Will breaks in.

“I don’t,” D contributes, rather meekly. The bathtub at the homeplace has been broken longer than D can remember, and they’ve always just washed up at the water pump, but D is conscious enough of Will’s already wounded sense of pride to avoid saying that much.

Hannibal doesn’t push back against Will but he doesn’t back down either. “There are reasons I’m being specific, Will,” he says. “Look at your hands.”

They both do as Hannibal said. Will has washed his hands at least a couple of times since they got to the hospital, but maybe he didn’t do such a good job, because D can see something rust-colored hiding in the wrinkles around his finger joints. It’s under Will’s nails, too, that rust-colored stuff.

D knows exactly what that stuff is, and he has a pretty good idea about where it came from too.

“I can still smell the blood on your hands, Will,” Hannibal continues, “even from over here. That blood can be traced back to its owner.”

Will is red faced, and D isn’t sure if it’s shame or anger that has him that way, but he says, “Give them here then.”

Hannibal hands the soap and the pick to Will.

“I’ll be in the other room if you need something,” he tells them. “After you’ve gotten dressed we’ll need to do the lice treatment, but that’s more easily managed over the sink.”

When Hannibal closes the door behind him, Will says, “You want to go first or should I?”

“I want to,” D says. “Is that okay?”

“Sure,” Will says. “Just let me figure this out.”

D undresses while Will fiddles with the shower. First the water roars into the tub but then Will works out how to make it come out of the shower head, hissing down like the hardest and heaviest rain D has ever seen. He turns one knob too hard and then jerks his fingers away from the flow, hissing.

“Scalding myself on this thing...” he mutters, but eventually he finds a good temperature, and he steps back to let D climb inside before closing the curtain to keep the water in.

The idea of it was a little scary, but now that he’s in the shower D doesn’t want to get out, the warm water feels so good against his weary body.

He looks down at his bare feet, and sees the way the water melts the dirt off him, even before he starts to scrub, the murky grey water flowing down the drain. More dirt washes away when he rubs the shampoo into his hair, little bits of leaves and other debris that had been stuck in it going along with it.

The soap smells fresh and clean, and the tea tree oil body wash that he uses last makes his skin tingle.

After he's done washing up he just stands under the water, letting it flow over him, until Will says, "You okay in there?" and D, says, "Yeah, but it's too nice to want to leave."

He does, though, feeling a little guilty for hogging the shower for so long, and Will passes him a fluffy white towel that's big enough to use as a blanket and says, "Be careful not to get too much water on the floor."

"It feels like my skin is *breathing*," D tells him.

"Look at you," Will says, and his smile is wide but there's something in his voice that's almost painful. "All washed up and good as new."

D takes that literally, and all bundled up in the oversized towel like it's a cloak, he steps in front of the mirror and looks. His dark hair is standing up and pointing in every direction, and D thinks that's funny, but...

But mirrors have started to worry D in a way that they never have before. There are mirrors everywhere, it seems like, down here off the mountain, and shiny surfaces that are clean enough that they reflect D's face back at himself almost as good as a mirror. He's hasn't even been away from the homeplace for a full day, but he's already seen more faces than he can remember seeing in his entire life up until today - dozens and dozens of faces - but none of them have looked like the face he sees reflected back at him in the mirror now, and he's relieved when the steam from Will's shower fogs it up.

Still wrapped up in the towel and holding another to give to Will when he's done, D puts the lid down on the toilet and sits on it to wait for Will to finish with his turn under the water. After longer than D might have expected, Will turns off the water and reaches out to take the towel him.

Will's skin is rosy when he steps out of the shower, but there are hectic splotches on his face that makes D think that he'd been crying in there.

Chapter 5

Chapter by [PragmaticHominid](#)

It's a good day, all told, that first lazy day in the hotel room.

In fact, Will thinks it might be the best day of D's life, or at least the best day he's had since Will stole him, and he knows that his brother doesn't remember anything of the life he had before that.

There's a bitterness to that, watching Hannibal provide them both with so much more than Will ever managed to scrounge up, and all while barely seeming to even have to try. The sense of his own inadequacy that provoked brought him to tears in the quiet isolation of the shower, but Will is trying his best to hide those feelings and to focus instead on everything that is new and good about their situation.

There are so many new things to enjoy, really, and Will doesn't want to bring D down.

So Will changes into the new clothes, which fit like a dream, and follows Hannibal's instructions when he drapes a clean towel around Will's shoulders to protect that new clean shirt and has him bow his head over the kitchen sink so Hannibal can scrub the lice treatment into his scalp. It burns, but not too badly, and Will waits it out until it's time to rinse.

When that's done with, Hannibal sits Will down in one of the kitchen chairs and begins to work the tangles out of Will's damp hair. It's a tricky process, since it's been a while since Will thought to sit down and brush through his curls, and inevitably the comb snags in his hair.

Will has been sitting absolutely still, out of fear that fidgeting might agitate Hannibal, but when the comb jerks to a stop Will can't help but shy away; it's only a small pain, but there's a great deal of precedent which leads Will to expect tiny hurts to be followed by big ones.

Hannibal's hands withdraw, taking the comb with them.

"My apologies, Will," he says, and Will blinks, entirely unsure about what to do with that. Hannibal gives Will a bit of time to steel himself before starting again, and this time he's put the comb to the side to focus first on working through the bigger knots with his hands.

Those hands are big - they are big and strong enough to break Will to pieces easily - but they are agile too, and the fingers and palms are peculiarly soft and free of calluses.

The gentleness of those hands, throughout the long process of working through the tangles and then combing his hair out, is as alien to Will as the apology. It occurs to Will, while Hannibal pins his hair up in sections, that nothing like this has happened to him before.

My Mama took care of me, a voice inside Will's skull asserts in argument, as Hannibal presses with the tips of his fingers to turn Will's head to the side, repositioning it. *I'd be dead*

if she hadn't. Maybe Wasco did too, back before everything got so bad.

But those memories are long gone, if they ever existed, and nearly every recollection he has of being touched by Maynard or his uncles is marred by pain or the potential of pain. Jed with his clumsy hands, always grabbing too hard, always yanking or shoving without any real understanding of the harm he caused, or the way Soncy had of causally cuffing Will across the face when he was under foot or didn't move fast enough to do something that he'd been told to do. The half-silly, half-malicious efforts Wasco would make to rile Will up by pinching him or pulling his hair, and Maynard...

Will doesn't want to think about Maynard right now.

Hannibal has begun to comb through his hair with a fine-toothed lice comb, deftly removing the nits and the poisoned lice, and suddenly Will is struck by an epiphany.

I'm being taken care of, he thinks. *That's what this is*, and his child's heart leaps at the idea, yearning towards it with a desperate hunger.

Then he is crying again, and does not understand why.

It's not shame this time, and the tears are not spurred on by a sense of having done poorly by D. He's crying for himself now, though he barely knows that.

D is beside him in a matter of moments. "Does it hurt?" he asks, his eyes darting up at Hannibal suspiciously before returning to study Will's face.

"No," Will says, fighting back against the need to cry harder - to break down sobbing, maybe.

Rubbing at his eyes with the back of his hand, Will forces a smile and says, "It doesn't hurt at all."

When Hannibal hands Will the room service menu he does so as a begrudging concession to his own wounded body. He would much rather have cooked for the boys himself, to see personally to their first real meal on the first full day of their sojourn out from the wilderness, but he is simply too weary.

Instead, he contents himself with studying the two boys as they browse the menu, D leaning over Will's shoulder while Will reads its offerings out loud to him, pausing occasionally to ask D to work out a word or sentence himself.

Will's pronunciation is on occasion creative, and most of the dishes are clearly unfamiliar to him, but Hannibal is nonetheless impressed by how quickly he rattles off the text. It's been evident from the beginning that Will possesses all the raw making of a savant, but Hannibal feels comfortable assuming that the boy has never seen the inside of a classroom, and he'd wondered if Will could read at all.

It seems that Will is not only literate, but has been working to teach D - who seems fairly bright himself - to read as well.

“What’s that word?” Will asks D now, point to something on the menu, and watching while the smaller boy focuses on working it out Hannibal finds himself returning to a cold winter’s day when he’d written Mischa’s name in the snow for her, drawing the letters almost as tall as she was, and encouraged her to sound it out. She’d been nearly three years old then, and Hannibal eight, and he’d despaired of her ever learning to read.

“Flies?” D offers, with a frown that tells Hannibal he knows he got it wrong.

“Close. Remember that it’s a food and try again.”

D squints at the menu and says questioningly, “Fries?” and when Will looks back at him and grins affirmingly D’s own face becomes full of awe.

“We can get fries?” he asks, almost in a whisper, and before Will can answer D’s head jerks towards Hannibal, who can see the fragile hope burning in his eyes, and repeats, “We can get fries?”

“Today you may have whatever you’d like.”

D shakes Will by the arm. “Did you hear that?” he asks. “We can get fries.”

“I heard him,” Will says. “Don’t shake me around, okay? My head still hurts something awful.”

Will casts his eyes up at Hannibal. “What’s the little v next to some of these things mean?”

“Vegetarian,” Hannibal tells him. “Those items do not include meat.”

Will looks back at the menu. “The mixed garden salad, then,” he says, “and fries.”

“Please,” D chimes in.

“Yeah. Please.”

“That’s fine,” Hannibal says, “but add at least one more thing to make it a more substantial meal.”

Hannibal watches him scan the menu. “Caprese Panini sandwiches, maybe?” he asks, a bit tentatively. “Please.”

They’ve had fries before, but only as cold leftovers scavenged from the bottom of fast food bags. It was a rare treat, especially for D, when they found a few old fries in one of the newly stolen cars, but nothing has prepared either of them for how good fresh French fries are.

The outside crunches when Will bites into it, but on the inside it is soft enough to melt in his mouth. Next to him at the table, D is nearly fidgeting out of his own skin, body swaying and legs kicking back and forth in barely bottled up delight at the meal before them.

It's unusually challenging to leave D the majority of those fries, given Will's long-standing rule of making sure his little brother got enough before taking much of anything for himself, but as soon as he turns his attention to the salad Will is almost as enamored with it as he was with the fries.

"It's mostly just leaves," Will says to Hannibal, for the sake of conversation, speaking around a mouthful of lettuce and tomato, "but there's something about it that my body feels like I just *need*."

"Vitamins," says Hannibal, who for his part doesn't seem to be eating much. "And nutrients. You're malnourished, Will."

"I don't know anything about that," Will says, carefully stabbing some more salad onto the end of his fork. The uncles weren't much for silverware, but Hannibal seems to expect that they use it, so Will is doing his best to pretend that he's used to eating that way. "It just feels like my body needs it."

"You should have more fresh vegetables with your dinner," Hannibal says, and that's what Will does.

When dinner rolls around, Will and D order another salad to share between themselves, and more fries too. At Hannibal's suggestion, they add a veggie tray with red pepper hummus, too. Avoiding meat for reasons that aren't quite clear, even to himself, Will rounds it all out with a grilled cheese, while D tries a tuna melt.

By the time dinner is over with and the leftovers stored away in the fridge, Hannibal looks beat. He's exhausted, obviously, and from the way he moves Will thinks that the arrow wound is really starting to talk to him.

He goes to bed early, retreating into his room and closing the door behind him, and Will and D go to their rooms too but they don't go to sleep. Instead, they sit up together in their big bed, dressed in fluffy white hotel robes and eating cookies from the minibar, and watch two Disney movies in a row on the big screen tv.

It's only after D falls asleep that Will starts to really worry.

Throughout the day, Will has tried to accept the situation as easily as D does, to simply enjoy the good and have fun, and aside from the two crying jags he thinks he's done a pretty good job at that. But the entire time there's been a nagging voice in the back of Will's skull, insisting that none of this can be trusted.

When D's good natured stream of chatter is replaced by his habitual wheezing snores, the voice in Will's head gets loud.

This is too much, it tells him, again and again. *It's all too much. He wants something else.*

Alone now, the lights from the city below them filtering in through the curtains dimly, Will starts to get worked up about the idea of what that something else might be.

Suspicious that Hannibal didn't plant sprout up in the dark regardless, and Will sits up for a long time, mulling them over.

Eventually, Will gets out of bed and, quietly, lets himself into Hannibal's room.

Chapter 6

Chapter by [PragmaticHominid](#)

Chapter Notes

Hey guy, real quick - content warning for discussion of child sexual assault on this one. It's nothing specific or detailed, but Will is talking around the edges of some trauma here.

The rustle of the stiff hotel quilt wakes Hannibal.

There is a moment, extremely brief, in which he contends with a sense of disorientation, an uncertainty as to his surroundings.

He places himself first, recalling the subpar hotel bed and the circumstances that brought him to it, and then he makes sense of the slight form that has crossed the darkened room to lay down in the bed beside him.

Hannibal feels a moment of personal dissatisfaction with himself, paired with a vague sense of unease that Will was able to slip into the room and get so close without him waking.

At first he thinks, *Nightmares*, but just as quickly Hannibal rejects the idea. If intangible fears crept up on Will in the night, he wouldn't come looking for comfort from an adult he as of yet barely knows. He would have cleaved closer to D, utilizing his own reluctance to upset the smaller boy as a means of bringing his fears to heel, and remained in their bed to keep watch.

Therefore, Will is here now because Hannibal is the thing that he is frightened of.

Hannibal reaches out and clicks on the reading lamp.

The boy is lying on his side, head propped up beneath his arm, which is extended towards the headboard. The light has caught him reaching towards Hannibal with his other hand, as though he intends to touch his chest.

That hand falters now, hesitating. Hannibal catches the hand, as carefully as if it was a small bird, and returns it to Will's side of the bed.

He looks back at the boy, who is glaring at him with a wounded kind of defiance that is clearly waiting for a reason to tumble down into hatred. Will, Hannibal thinks, looks as slim as a blade of grass and almost as fragile.

"Are you looking to screw me?" he asks.

Hannibal keeps his face carefully neutral as he moves to sit up against the headboard. Will also sits up.

“What provoked your question?”

“My Papaw - Maynard - told me, back when they first started using me for bait, that any grown man that tried to take me off the mountain was only out to screw me.”

Prime him to fear outsiders, Hannibal thinks, further isolation from anyone who might interfere.

He asks, “Do you know what that word means?”

Shame bleeds into Will’s face, mingling with the stubborn defiance, and that strange mixture alarms Hannibal more than anything that has happened so far.

Will breaks eye contact with Hannibal, and cheeks flushing red against his otherwise pallid face, he says, “I know a few things.” And then, so quickly that he is tripping over his own words, he says, “And I can learn, I don’t care, I just want to know -”

“Will,” Hannibal says, without any inflection. The smallest sign of rage or disgust now would be easily misinterpreted, and he schools his expression into neutrality.

“I’ll do what you want,” Will says, with a sudden strange calm. Later, Hannibal will learn that that particular type of serenity tends to overtake Will when he is on the verge of tipping over a dangerous precipice. “I don’t care if it hurts, but D has to be off limits, and he can’t know -”

Hannibal says Will’s name again, and the boy falls quiet, worrying his lower lip between his teeth.

Trauma reactions are to be expected, given the boys’ history, and Hannibal is neither especially surprised nor angry - or rather, he’s not angry with Will - but it is important, now, that he be exceedingly clear.

“I’ve no intention of screwing you,” he tells Will. “I don’t want that from you - not you or D. You don’t have to worry about that.”

Watching Will closely to see if the boy is able to believe that, Hannibal notes that his eyes are glassy with tears again. *There is a breakdown coming*, he thinks, not for the first time, *but probably not tonight.*

“There is one thing that you can do for me,” he goes on.

Will’s breath hitches in his chest, but after a long moment he says guardedly, “Yeah?”

“Don’t use Maynard as your standard of measurement for what to expect from me. I’m nothing like him.”

“Alright,” Will says, but Hannibal sees a shadow cross the boy’s face, and knows that his suspicions were correct. He is glad all over again that the old man is dead, but only wishes that he’d had some time with him first.

But contending with things that Will is not ready or able to say now is not a task for tonight, and instead Hannibal says, “There may be difficult truths that D needs to be protected from, down the line, but that won’t be one of them.

“Go back to your room. We have important meetings in the morning.”

The meeting with the social worker goes well.

Hannibal anticipated difficulties - the need to charm, threaten, bribe or perhaps kill to clear a path between himself and legal custody of the boys, but the pieces continue to fall into place with stunning ease, as though it was meant to be from the beginning.

The boys themselves make it easier.

They are both shy with the stranger, but whereas D refuses to look at the social worker when they are introduced, and quickly retreats behind the couch to watch the woman from hiding, Will spends the entirety of the meeting staring as though he is imagining the process necessary to dismember her.

They are disconcerting, the two of them, though D doesn’t intend to be, and that combined with the tremendous expenditures that will be needed to address their many medical problems and contend with the traumas they have experienced hardly make them desirable candidates for foster care or placement in a group home.

An offer from a well-monied psychiatrist to take responsibility for their care comes as a blessing. Indeed, the social worker tells Hannibal, “Bless your heart,” at least four times over the course of the meeting. There’s a degree of condescension in her tone, but Hannibal is happy to accept that little indignity if it means getting his way.

By the time she says her goodbyes they have a court date and a path forward towards legal custody. The only real drawback is that they will be expected to stay in the state until things are resolved, but that’s a hardship Hannibal can manage.

As soon as the door closes behind the social worker Will walks over to the fridge. He can’t be especially hungry, as they only just ate breakfast an hour before, but he understands the comfort that comes from a well-appointed larder.

He opens the door and looks inside as Hannibal, still thinking of the easy praise the woman heaped on him, says, “I’ve never been so blessed.”

Will snorts and pokes his head out from around the fridge door long enough to say, “She was making fun of you.”

Returning his attention to the contents of the fridge, he goes on, “She thinks you’ve bitten off more than you chew, and that sooner or later it’s going to come back to bite you in the ass, but she’d rather it be you than her.”

“Well,” Hannibal says, “passive aggression is better than most of the alternatives.”

“Sure,” Will says. He’s relaxed, now that the social worker is gone, more chipper than Hannibal has ever seen him, and he knows that stems both from their conversation the night before and the reassurance that, at least for the time being, no one will try to take him away. “You want something to eat?”

The next few days pass easily. The boys are happy, and eager to learn more about their recently expanded world, and Hannibal watches and learns himself as the pair of them begin to understand who they are when not under constant threat and hardship.

The two of them seem to be adjusting so well that, when the explosion finally does come, Hannibal is nearly blindsided by it.

Chapter 7

Chapter by [PragmaticHominid](#)

“Why do your hands feel like that?” D asks, squirming as Hannibal rubs the suntan lotion on his back.

“Like what?”

D tries to crane his neck around to see Hannibal’s face. “Soft!” he says, and when that doesn’t turn Hannibal mean he decides that it’s alright to lift a hand to his own mouth and giggle behind it.

“I used to be a surgeon,” Hannibal tells him. “I’m still in the habit of taking careful care of my hands.”

From beside them, Will says, “That’s a kind of doctor, right?”

“Yes,” Hannibal tells him. “Now I’m a psychiatrist. A different kind of doctor.”

“That Frederick Chilton said he was one of those too,” Will answers. “A psychiatrist.”

There’s a note of something that D can’t quite parse in Will’s voice, and he looks to his brother to try to see if anything is wrong, barely hearing when Hannibal answers, “Frederick was a psychiatrist only in a technical sense.

“Come here, Will. It’s your turn.”

Will goes, and stands a lot more still than D managed to do while Hannibal rubs the lotion on his back and shoulders. D watches Will, trying to decide how he’s feeling - how he’s *really* feeling.

His brother has been relaxed and happy over the last week, most of the time, but he’s also been crying more than D’s ever seen, and D himself doesn’t have the emotional maturity to consider that that might be a good thing.

“You understand the rules for the pool?”

Will scowls at that, but D repeats, “Don’t run or push, don’t go into water deeper than up to my chest, come out when you say it’s time to leave.”

Then he asks, “You aren’t going to swim?”

“Not today,” Hannibal says. “Injuries like the one I received last week need to be kept dry.”

There are less than a dozen people in or around the pool, but for the boys that still constitutes a nearly unprecedented crowd. Intimidated as soon as they've passed through the doors leading to the outdoor pool, D hesitates.

Will stops too, but not for the same reason.

"That water doesn't smell safe," he says, and D thinks that's a good point; even from here, the chemical burn of the water makes the inside of his nose sting.

Back on the mountain, there'd been a small pound that could get up to D's waist after it rained, and sometimes they would splash around in that, but they never swam in the creek. There were chemicals in that water, Will told him, and that was what put the tumors on the fish that Maynard sometimes caught.

"What you smell is chlorine," Hannibal tells him. "It keeps the water sanitary to swim in by killing germs. If you get it in your eyes it may sting a little, but as long as you don't swallow it the water is completely safe."

D, who is fully reassured by Hannibal's tone, barely registers the words himself.

He is looking down the paved pathway and into the sparkling blue water, where three older boys are splashing around in the deep end. They have a huge, multi-colored ball that they keep throwing to one another or spiking down into the water to make a splash.

D watches the three boys and the ball, so entranced that he barely draws his eyes away from them as Hannibal points out the steps down into the shallow end of the pool before taking a seat in one of the plastic chairs nearby.

"Come on," Will says, tugging on D wrist to lead him into the water.

It's chilly, despite the warmth of the day, and halfway down the steps D squeaks and says, "That's cold!"

Maybe he said that louder than was polite, because the splashing at the other end of the pool halts suddenly. D glances that way, and sees that the boys have stopped wrestling and are staring in his direction, the ball floating forgotten in the water beside them. Some of the adults are watching him too.

"Sure is," Will says, as though he's noticed none of this. "Come on now. We're going to have fun," he adds, but D doesn't think he sounds very convinced.

D hops down the last step, bringing him into water that comes up to his chest, gasping at the chill even as he enjoys the buoyancy the water gives him.

Tentatively, he bounces up and down, bringing his arms down hard on the water to make a splash, and Will shields his eyes and laughs in a way that almost sounds real.

That encourages D to splash around more, and it is fun, though when he gets a little bit of water up his nose it stings something awful.

“See?” Will says, as D glances back at the boys on the other end of the pool. They’re talking to each other, but D can’t hear what they’re saying. “We’ve just got to get used to things like this, and then we’ll like it. That’s why Hannibal brought us down here.”

“That boy’s coming over here,” D says.

“Stay here,” Will says, and wades out into the deeper water to meet him.

D glances over his shoulder to Hannibal, trying to see if any of this is alright, but he doesn’t look back at D. Hannibal is, D thinks, watching very closely while also working hard to avoid looking like that’s what he’s doing.

“How old are you?” the stranger asks Will.

“Twelve,” Will tells him flatly.

“No way,” the other boy argues, but without much heat.

Looking back and forth from them, D almost grasps his objection; the other boy seems so much bigger than Will, and not just taller but more fleshed out. Looking at them from across the pool, D thought the boys were older than Will by at least a couple of years, but now he wonders if this one is Will’s age, or maybe even younger.

Will doesn’t answer him, but he tries to straighten his shoulders and stand a little taller. From behind him, D sees the crooked knobs of his spine pressing outward against his skin.

“Do you want to play with us?” the stranger asks.

“No,” Will answers. “I’m watching my brother.”

The other boy gives D a long, measuring stare. “He can come too. I guess,” he allows, looking back to Will.

“No,” Will repeats. “We don’t want to play with you.”

The stranger looks a little hurt at that. Then he looks angry. And then he shrugs.

“Whatever,” he says, turning away slowly against the drag of the water. “Y’all are weird anyway.”

D felt disappointed when Will refused the invitation, but watching the faces the trio of boys pull when the stranger rejoins them makes him feel sick with mistrust.

“You alright?” Will asks him.

What D is feeling right now is too big and ugly and complicated for him to even understand, let alone put into words. Instead he says, “I wanted to play with that ball. It’s real pretty.”

“Maybe I can figure out how to get you one.”

“Maybe,” D repeats. He *does* want the ball - is fixated on it now, point of fact - but it’s only a proxy for other things that he doesn’t know how to ask for but that he suspects are even harder to obtain than a brightly colored toy.

“Never mind them,” Will says. “We’re having fun.”

And for a while, they do.

Will dog paddles from one side of the shallow end to the other, while D is happier just to lift his legs off the bottom of the pool and float, moving his arms to spin himself in lazy circles.

When the beach ball hits D on the back of the head it does so with a lot of force, but it’s too light actually hurt, and for a moment he doesn’t understand what hit him.

Then he sees the ball, floating in the water next to him, and hears the stranger tearing through the water in pursuit of it. D lunges for it, pressing the ball to his chest possessively, and then the bigger boy is on top of D, his momentum and weight dragging the both of them under the water.

All fantasies of the colorful ball discarded, D scrabbles desperately for the surface and comes up howling and terrified, the chlorine burning the inside of his nose and deep into his sinuses.

The bigger boy has backed off and is watching, scared, as Will scopes D up and carries him to the edge of the pool. Hannibal is there, standing on the bottom step and beckoning Will towards him with words that D can’t hear over the sounds of his own wailing and the thudding of the blood in his ears, and when Will passes D to him he sees that Hannibal slipped out of his shoes before he waded into the pool, but that his socks and pant legs are soaked.

Hannibal turns to carry D up the steps, and because his back is now to the pool he doesn’t see what D, looking over Hannibal’s shoulder with tear-blurred eyes, sees - Will turning back to wade into the water to approach the bigger boy.

“Is he okay?” the boy asks, the fear in his voice stark. “I didn’t mean -” but then Will is on him, and he has time to let out half a yelp before Will bangs his head against the side of the pool and pushes him under the water.

When Hannibal rises from the pool and tries to sit D down, panic makes him cling harder, and it takes perhaps thirty seconds for Hannibal to disentangle himself.

Hannibal spins back towards the commotion, where the bigger boy’s friends are trying, without much luck, to pull Will off him. There are other adults there, too, but Hannibal slips past them and bends to snag Will under his arms and hauls him, kicking and screaming, from the water.

He goes still as death as soon as Hannibal puts him down on the walkway. D runs to Will and tangles his arms around his waist, and feels his brother’s body begin to shiver so violently that it seems to be trying to shudder itself to pieces.

Hannibal looks down on them and says, in a low voice that brooks no arguments, “Go back to the suite, the both of you.”

Then he turns away from them and says, in a tone as different as day from night, “Let me see him, please. I’m a doctor.”

Will and D do as they’re told.

Chapter 8

Chapter by [PragmaticHominid](#)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Will and D go up the suite and sit on their bed.

Will is breathing strangely, and though he is leaning over himself with his arms curled over his middle like he has a belly ache, D can see the way the short and shallow grasps make his chest rise and fall. It reminds D of a hurt bird he saw once, the desperate way it fluttered its unbroken wing as it tried to fly away.

He sits that way for what feels to D to be a very long time, and when he can't stand the silence anymore D reaches out and shakes him by the shoulder.

"Is he going to hit you?" D asks. "Will? Should we run away?"

D's eyes are still watering from the reeking burn of the water that invaded his sinuses, and when Will tilts his head to the side to glance briefly at D he sees that Will's eyes are wet too.

"Leave me alone," he says.

"Oh," D says, and lets his hand fall.

He sits beside Will, hands twitching fretfully, but then an idea strikes D, and he gets up in a hurry and heads for the kitchen.

The knife block is too high up for D to reach it, but he's good at climbing, and it isn't hard for him to get up on the counter and draw a knife from the block. He sits the blade on the counter, climbs down, then picks it up again and heads down the hallway for Will.

He's never used a knife on anybody, but he knows that they can be, and has a pretty good idea how.

On the way back to the bedroom, D catches his own reflection in the bathroom mirror.

He veers into the bathroom and comes to a slow stop in front of the mirror.

Without planning to do so, and without any conscious awareness of the emotions driving his actions, he picks a tumbler off the counter and bashes it against the glass.

When Will hears the glass break he hauls himself up from the bed to see what happened.

He feels frozen inside himself, too numbed by the tremulous emotions roiling under his skin to properly differentiate any of them, but when he sees what D has in his hand fear breaches the surface and takes over.

That fear pulls anger out after it, and he demands, “What the hell are you doing with that?” It’s hard, with everything that has happened, to keep from taking the smaller boy by the shoulders and shaking him.

Instead, he catches D by the forearm and with his other hand pries his fingers back to take the knife.

“Don’t be mad, Will,” D whines. “You’re hurting me.”

There’s a moment, stunning in its nightmarish clarity, where Will sees in his mind’s eye everything that might have befallen the boy if on the day D’s family was waylaid Will hadn’t gotten to him before his uncles did, and beneath the too-tight grip he still has on D’s arm Will can swear he feels the skin crackle and burn like the flesh of a roasting piglet, the heat of it enough to blister Will’s hand.

Will lets go.

He wants to tell D that he’s sorry, and he wants to explain all the reasons why seeing D with the knife frightened him so badly, but Will’s tongue feels dead in his mouth and he cannot form words.

Instead, he turns for the kitchen.

Will reaches up to put the knife back into the block, and that’s when the card reader on the other side of the door clicks and Hannibal steps into the suite.

The knife is still in Will’s hand, and Will supposes that he knows how that looks to Hannibal, and that makes him frantic with fear of how Hannibal will take it, and that fear remakes a potential misunderstanding into reality, and instead of putting the knife away and then making up some pretext for why he had it Will brandishes the blade at him.

Taking the knife away from Will is not a difficult task, given that the boy has no real commitment to using it on him.

When Hannibal advances towards Will, moving neither slowly nor hurrying, the boy retreats backwards until he comes up against the counter.

Hannibal takes one final step closer, and in unknowing imitation of how Will disarmed D only minutes before he grasps Will by the forearm, just above the juncture of his elbow, and curls his own hand around the one that is holding the knife.

Then he waits, patiently, for Will to relinquish the weapon.

When he does, Hannibal returns it to its rightful place, and then he turns back to the boys and says, “Will, sit down at the table.”

Will doesn’t seem to hear him - appears too lost inside his own head to be processing much of anything that is happening around him. The fear stink in the air now is worse than any of the smells the boys brought down off the mountain with them, and conscious that if he makes a wrong move either or both of them might explode in feral raging terror, Hannibal places one hand on Will’s upper arm and presses the other gently between his shoulder blades, and turns Will in the direction of the table.

“Sit down,” he says again, and this time Will moves forward and does as asked.

“We won’t be staying in this hotel any longer,” Hannibal tells them. “I’ve arranged for different lodgings.”

He looks to D. “Go and gather up all of your and Will’s belongings and sit them neatly on the bed for me, please. I would like to pack up quickly, and that will be of great help.”

“Will?” D says, and the question is seeped in uncertain panic.

“It’s alright,” Will tells him, flatly. “Go on and do what he told you.”

After a moment’s hesitation, D turns and does so.

Chapter End Notes

I realized recently that I don't think I ever stated D's age.

That leaves me curious - How old does he read as being to you guys?

Chapter 9

Chapter by [PragmaticHominid](#)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Hannibal fills a glass with water from the purifier jug and sits it on the table in front of Will. Next to the glass he places a small sky-blue pill.

“I’d like for you to take this,” Hannibal tells him.

“What is it?”

“Valium. It will help you calm down.”

Will has gotten used to swallowing pills, though Hannibal needed to explain to him how it was done. He was on prescription painkillers for a few days after the car accident, and has been taking Tylenol since.

Will picks the pill up and swallows it.

Hannibal pats him lightly on the shoulder before turning away. It should take about twenty minutes for the valium to kick in, and in the meantime Hannibal busies himself making tea.

Putting the kettle (which he had delivered here to make up for the suite’s lack of one) on the stove, Hannibal then reaches into the cupboards to take down the tea and two cups. Hannibal hums to himself a little as he does this, but he’s listening closely to know if Will gets up from the table.

When the tea is ready, Hannibal places one cup in front of Will, and then sits down at the other side of the table with his own.

“Chamomile with lavender,” Hannibal says, and suggests, “Breathe it in, Will. The scent alone is soothing.”

Privately, Hannibal has more faith in the medicinal benefits of diazepam than he does herbal remedies, but Will needs more than a sedative. He needs to feel secure and grounded, and the reality of the cup in his hands and the warmth it provides and the knowledge that it was made specially for him all in their little ways aid towards that.

“I think that I made a mistake,” he tells Will, with what is essentially honesty, and watches Will’s face closely to see how he takes it.

The boys were making good progress, and over the last several days Hannibal put a lot of thought into the safest venue to test is their abilities to socialize with others.

He'd considered the possibility of taking them to the hotel restaurant, on a walk down the street, or to a department store, but rejected each option in turn. The latter two possibilities contained more variables that could be easily managed, and the unpredictability of crowd behavior and the boys' reaction to it especially worried him, and furthermore if things went badly it extricating them from the situation might prove difficult.

The restaurant downstairs was closer to the closed-off safety of their suite, but it presented its own problems. Hannibal has put some time into helping them improve their table manners, which had previously been nonexistent, but though Will has a natural talent for mimicry that makes it easy for him to imitate anything Hannibal shows him, D is still struggling to learn how to use silverware. Further, the fissure in his lip and the absent row of upper incisors cause him to have difficulties with chewing. These issues do not trouble Hannibal, especially given that they will eventually be resolved, but he would not have liked for them to be subjected to negative attention that might have discouraged D or angered Will.

The pool, in contrast, seemed a much better option. This early in the season it was almost empty, and it seemed likely that the scattered patrons would keep to themselves. If anyone did approach the boys they would do so individually or in small groups, and Hannibal expected to be able to intervene if the interaction became too challenging for D or Will to manage on their own.

But Will proved to be shockingly quick to violence, even by Hannibal's own standards, and with his wounded gut and D tangled in his arms Hannibal was not able to step in and take control of the situation as briskly as he would have liked to have done.

Hannibal continues, "You're responsible for your own actions, Will, but I know also that a tremendous amount of change has been thrown at you in less than a week. I should have managed the situation better."

Will sits with that in silence for a little while.

He does feel calmer now, though his head is a little foggy, and he can *almost* grok the subtext of what Hannibal is saying.

"You hung back because you were waiting to see what I'd do," he says, less as an accusation than a statement of fact.

"I can't keep the two of you locked in these rooms forever. I wanted to see how you would do out among other people, so I'd have a clearer picture of what to do next."

"I'm not sorry I did that," Will says. "You aren't going to trick me into feeling sorry about it."

Hannibal doesn't rise to the bait.

"What were you thinking," he asks instead, "when you did it?" Hannibal doesn't sound like he's angry. He seems simply curious.

“I wasn’t thinking much,” Will says, straining towards honesty. “Just seeing red. But as much as I was thinking it was something like, ‘D’s safe with you now, so I can go and take care of business.’”

“You didn’t waste any time.”

Will shrugs that off. “Are they going to bring the law down on us?”

“I don’t think so,” Hannibal says.

“Why not?”

“I have a talent for convincing people,” he tells Will. Then, after a moment he adds, “Funds may have also changed hands.”

“I don’t think I did anything wrong,” Will says, returning to his argument like a dog to an old bone. It hadn’t, in fact, occurred to Will that he’d done anything he shouldn’t have until Hannibal pulled him out of the water and sent him back to his room. “And I don’t think that you think I did wrong, either.”

“I’m not looking for expressions of guilt, Will. Just a little foresight. A bit of consideration of the risks before you undertake a course of action.

“Perhaps,” he adds, and there’s a ghost of something like a smile on Hannibal’s lips now, “a sense of proportion.”

“I don’t understand you,” Will says, but he feels less afraid now, and that isn’t just the pill; Hannibal isn’t going to hurt him - not over this anyway, and not today.

“The nuance of it doesn’t matter at the moment,” Hannibal says, waving that away. “What I’m telling you is that it’s fine to get even, on occasion, but don’t get caught.

“There’s a host of moral and practical reasons why attempting to drown another child in front of ten witnesses and a set of security cameras isn’t a wise course of action.”

“Never mind that,” Will says, angry all over again. “He dunked D on purpose.”

“Do you really think so? Are you sure?”

The question hits Will like a blow.

He looks inside himself, trying to find an answer.

“No,” he admits finally, but it comes out as barely a whisper.

All over again his throat is getting tight and tears are burning in his eyes, and he pounds the side of his fist against the table in frustration and says again, “No.

“I’m not, and that’s the goddamn problem. I don’t know who is and isn’t out to get him. I can’t tell.

“It feels like almost everybody we’ve seen goes cold or gets nervous or turns nasty when they see his face, but maybe I’m wrong about that and there’s something else that’s making them look at him like that, or maybe most of them are acting just fine and I’m on such a hair trigger that I’m imagining it.

“I don’t think I am, though - not most of the time, at least - because D’s catching onto it too. They’re being ugly about the way he looks and talks and D’s seeing that and it’s hurting him.”

Hannibal asks, “Did he break the mirror on purpose?”

Will hesitates. It’s bad enough to have to wait and see what Hannibal might punish him for, but he doesn’t want to tell on D if it might bring trouble down on him.

The lack of an answer is as good as a confirmation.

“I thought he might have.”

“I should have been watching him,” Will says. “If you’re going to give somebody a whooping for it you whoop me,” but he’s just doing his duty. For now, at least, Will has faith that Hannibal isn’t going to hurt either of them.

Hannibal does not allow himself to be sidetracked by offering reassurances.

“I need you to understand this, Will, and I need you to bear it in mind no matter what happens; If the authorities decide that you are dangerous, and *especially* if they decide that you are dangerous in a way which I can’t control or correct, then they will take you away from me and they will take D away from us both.”

The fear that the pill drove down suddenly comes flowing back into Will’s belly, filling him with a nauseous dread.

“There are a number of things that I can shield you from,” Hannibal goes on, “and more importantly I can teach you how to protect yourself, but if you’d killed that boy, or even injured him badly enough to send him to the hospital, there’s little I could do to spare you the consequences.

“You have to be careful - we all have to be careful - especially until the legal situation is cleared up and we’re all safely in Baltimore.”

“Okay,” Will says, around the lump in his throat.

“I’m not trying to frighten you,” Hannibal tells him. “I know that you’re doing your best.”

He stands up, and Will sees the pain in him as he does, if only because Hannibal allows it to be visible, the way the arrow wound still hurts him. Will wants to do something to help him with that, but can’t think of how to ask what he needs.

“This was much too soon,” Hannibal says, picking up the original thread of the conversation. “Not just the pool but this hotel itself.

“We’re going to try somewhere different - something a little more familiar for you, and rather more isolated.”

A few hours later, they arrive at Wolf Creek Lodge and check into their cabin.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks everyone who answered my question about D's age.

I'd intended him to be about seven, give or take a year, so it was really nice to learn that's how people were reading him. <3

Chapter 10

Chapter by [PragmaticHominid](#)

Chapter Notes

Hi all.

Situation(s) in fandom had me down and apparently it's been more than a month since I posted to either of my WIPs... which is unprecedented since I joined this fandom... but here I am with an update and great hope that the next one won't take nearly so long.

<333

It's a two and a half hour drive from the hotel to Wolf Creek Lodge and its surrounding rental cabins and woodlands.

The three of them spend the trip in the back of a rather poorly maintained Cayenne, but at least the chauffeur has enough courtesy to refrain from commenting upon the children or their destination.

During the first leg of their journey Will fought against sleep, too transfixed the sights of the city to succumb to his own exhaustion.

The boy was seated in the middle back seat, a deliberate effort to use himself as a buffer between Hannibal and D that Hannibal allowed, and as Will swiveled his head to look out past the tinted glass windows to either side Hannibal could see the way his face twitched and grimaced. His eyes darted around in their sockets, his gaze moving from the buildings to the other vehicles to the people walking down the sidewalks or waiting for buses or doing any of the other things people often did - a thousand and one everyday sights, common on the streets of any moderately sized city, and each one foreign and new to Will, all loaded with potential threats.

"How does it all strike you, Will?" Hannibal asked, but at first Will only shook his head as though there was a fly buzzing in his ear and went on trying to monitor everything around them all at once.

D was staring too, but he limited his observations to his own window, his forehead pressed against the glass to get as close as he could to all of the things on the other side, and he didn't regard what was out there with the same fear as his brother.

Hannibal waited. Eventually, his patience paid off. "There's just so much to it," Will muttered. "And this is just a tiny chunk of everything that's out there."

“You don’t need to contend with the entire world just now, Will,” Hannibal reassured him, but his words did little to encourage the boy to let his guard down.

It was only after the city gave way to the highway and then tree-lined two-lane rural roads that the more familiar monotony began to lull Will to sleep. He’d drifted, his head lolling against D shoulder and then shifting with the motions of the SUV to lean against Hannibal.

Will is still asleep when they turn off the rural road and onto the camp grounds. He stirs when the Cayenne leaves the pavement behind for a gravel road, but then drifts away again as they travel past the lodge hotel and up a winding one-lane path that takes them past many clusters of small cabins, until at last the road finds its terminus in front of a grouping of three larger cabins.

These are the best that Wolf Creek Lodge has to offer, as well as the most isolated, and Hannibal has arranged that the two cabins which stand to either side of the one they will be staying in remain vacant until further notice.

“Will,” Hannibal says, and touches his shoulder. “We’re here.”

He jerks awake and cries out, terrified eyes darting around in their sockets as he struggles to orient himself. D shies away, pushing himself against the SUV’s door, and watches worriedly.

Will brings himself back under control quickly - or at least, he manages to approximate a veneer of calm. It’s obvious to Hannibal by now that Will has had a deal of practice at pretending that he is just fine, and not only for D’s sake.

They all exit the SUV, and when the chauffeur heads towards the rear of the Cayenne to retrieve their bags Will circles around from the other side to watch him suspiciously as he picks up the bags and carries them to the front door of the cabin.

All the boys’ current worldly possessions are contained in those bags, and Hannibal is confronted by the memory of what it was like to have so little - to have even less, only the ragged clothing on his back as he stumbled barefoot through the blowing snow.

The door to the cabin has been left unlocked, per Hannibal’s request.

He opens it up and they step inside.

The cabin is rustic, but in an affected way that is tailored to avoid inconveniencing middle-class vacationers.

It’s built of varnished pine, floor to ceiling, the unpolished knotholes displayed along the rafters and walls. Even the kitchen table and bed frames are made of the same shiny golden-brown wood.

The smell of pine sap, while not unpleasant, is entirely inescapable.

Will limps from room to room, his dark-ringed eyes narrowed suspiciously as he explores.

“Closer to what you’re used to?” Hannibal inquires.

“This place isn’t a thing like home,” Will tells him. He pauses to pull back the curtain on the shower, braced as though expecting an unpleasant surprise. Will lets the air out of his chest when he finds nothing but clean porcelain and a bar of soap on the other side, and adds, “Thank god for that.”

There are three bedrooms, though Hannibal has no expectation that either boy will be willing to sleep alone in their own room any time soon. The larger of the two children’s rooms features bunk beds, the frame built from the same polished pinewood that makes up the floors, walls and ceilings of the cabin.

When Will sees that he asks D, “You want the top one?” and despite the strain he is under Hannibal sees a tired smile pull at the edges of Will’s mouth at the prospect of being able to offer his brother something that will really make him happy.

The words are hardly out of Will’s mouth before D is scaling the ladder to the top bunk. Will sinks down onto his own bed wearily, but doesn’t lay down.

The panic has Will in its teeth again, Hannibal sees. The valium kept it at bay, for a little while, but now all the known and as yet amorphous fears are circling in on their prey once again to join the feast.

The conflict at the pool and its potential repercussions are the most recent flashpoint, but what this is goes so much deeper than that. The boy has been teetering on the verge of emotional and physical collapse for the majority of his short life, and now Hannibal tells him gently, “You need to get some proper rest,” but Will shakes his head in denial.

“I don’t want to.”

“What are you afraid will happen when you fall asleep?”

“I’m not afraid,” Will lies, and when he raises a hand to brush the hair out of his face Hannibal sees how badly it's shaking.

“I just don’t feel good,” Will says, and looks up to meet his eyes for the first time since they left the hotel. “Can I have another pill?”

Hannibal considers that from a clinical standpoint. He does not believe that the pleading in the boy’s eyes influences his decision. “You can have half a valium,” he tells Will.

D continues to watch from the top bunk as Hannibal leaves and then comes back with the pill and a glass of water.

When Hannibal hands these to Will, D crawls to the foot of his bunk and cranes his neck to peer over the edge to see Will, pale-faced and upside-down, drinking the rest of the water before handing the cup back to Hannibal.

His brother grumbles a little, when Hannibal kneels to untie Will's shoes, but he lets Hannibal take them off and put them to the side, and when Hannibal lifts the blankets for Will to crawl under them Will does.

He's asleep not long after that.

"He has bad dreams," D tells Hannibal.

"I'm not surprised."

D moves to the edge of the bunk, threads his legs through the railing so they dangling out in the open air. He kicks them, for fun, but not hard enough to shake the bed and maybe wake Will up again.

"Are you tired?" Hannibal asks him.

"Nah."

"Hungry?"

D nods eagerly.

"Come on then."

Chapter 11

Chapter by [PragmaticHominid](#)

Hannibal lifts D down from the top bunk and carries him to the kitchen.

It's nice, at first, to be picked up and held by someone who he can trust won't hurt him. He's been too big for Will to carry around for a while now, and whenever the uncles picked him up, which was rare anyways, they were either clumsy or too rough or both.

So it's nice, up until D remembers all over again what happened at the pool - Will handing him off to Hannibal so he could turn back and lay into the bigger boy who'd dunked D with the same weasel-quick violence that he'd seen Maynard exercise against Soncy, Wasco and Jed... against Will, too, at least twice that D witnessed.

It's a relief when Hannibal sits him down on the edge of the table. From that vantage point, D watches as Hannibal walks to the fridge and opens the freezer door, putting it between himself and D.

With Hannibal behind the freezer door, D can see the top of his head and his body from the chest down, and... D can see himself.

The open metal door is so shiny and clean that D can see a distorted reflection of his own face in it, and he turns his eyes away from that to focus instead on Hannibal's shoes, which are just as shiny but of a dark black leather that doesn't reflect back.

Hannibal spends a long time scanning the contents of the freezer. From where he's sitting D can't see what Hannibal is looking at, and he'd like to get up and look for himself at what all is inside there, but he isn't sure if he's supposed to stay put where Hannibal left him.

"Lets see..." Hannibal says. "We have chocolate ice cream."

He leans to the side to look at D from around the freezer door. "Would you like some?"

"Yes," he says eagerly. He adds, "I know what that is, but I've never had any."

Hannibal gives him a faint smile in return, and turns away to find two small bowls and a set of spoons.

When D takes the first bite he's immediately confronted by a combination of pleasure and pain.

He knows from experience that cold drinks make the roof of his mouth sting, and usually sips them carefully, but now he is so excited to try the ice cream that he throws caution to the wind and tips a big spoonful into his mouth, and as soon as it touches the cleft in the roof of his mouth the cold induces a sudden stabbing headache that he feels from the back of his throat to the crown of his head.

It's *good*, regardless of the hurt, and D closes his eyes and grimaces but doesn't spit the ice cream out.

It melts in his mouth, and in its wake the headache passes almost as quickly as it came, and when he opens his eyes again Hannibal is watching him with what D imagines to be mild chagrin.

"I ought to have warned you," Hannibal tells him. "If you eat ice cream too quickly it can give you a headache. The medical term for that is *sphenopalatine ganglioneuralgia*, but most people call it 'brain freeze' or simply an 'ice cream headache.'

"I'd imagine that it's worse for you," Hannibal adds, "given the fissure in your palate."

D doesn't say anything. When they were on the mountain no one there noticed his face, except sometimes Maynard, who always found a reason to be mean if he wanted to. Now it's the only thing people seem to want to talk about, and if they aren't talking about it then they're finding ways to talk around it.

At least Hannibal's interest now doesn't feel hostile or pitying.

"There's something very simple we could do about that," Hannibal says, and passes his tablet across the table to D.

D looks down at the picture on the screen. "It's a partial denture with a prosthetic to cover the fissure," Hannibal explains as D stares at it, "so that you could eat and speak more easily."

The teeth are very straight and white, and the mouth plate bit is bubblegum pink. It's kind of pretty, D thinks, and he wants it.

But then, just as quickly, a sense of dissatisfaction overtakes the excitement.

"That's just for inside my mouth. It wouldn't do anything about my face."

"No," Hannibal agrees, "though it's worth getting, I think, simply on the merits of making life a little easier for you.

"As for the rest... Do you know what an operation is, D?"

"Yeah," D says, happy to be able to answer the question. "You had an operation to get that arrow taken out of you."

Hannibal looks pleased with his answer, too. "That's right.

"They could also do an operation - a series of operations, more likely - that would help with what the prosthetic cannot address."

"Does it hurt?" D asks, with less anxiety than he might have expected to feel. He knows the kind of hurt a knife can lay on someone, even if he's never been under the blade himself, but...

Hannibal is saying, “It didn’t hurt when they took the arrow out, because they gave me medication that allowed me to sleep through it. It hurts a little now, and will until its done healing, but I’m much better off than I would have been without the operation.

“Your ice cream is all but melted,” Hannibal continues. D had forgotten about it entirely. “Go ahead and finish it. We can talk more about this later.”

The bunk beds sway a little when D climbs up the ladder to the top, and that wakes Will.

“Alright?” Will mumbles, still drowsy.

D is slow to answer. The boards above Will creak softly as D moves from the ladder to the bed.

“Did you know,” D says eventually, “that there’s ways to fix my face?”

An angry spark ignites in the center of Will’s chest. “There’s nothing wrong with how you look,” he says, fully awake now.

D acts as though he didn’t hear. “I could get a prosthetic,” D says, obviously working hard to pronounce the word, which Will himself has never heard before. “Or an operation.”

It’s Will’s turn to fall silent.

“Will?” D asks, after a while. “What do you think about that, Will?”

There’s turmoil, inside of Will, top to bottom, but he makes his voice sound easy when he answers, “Maybe. We can talk about it tomorrow, alright?”

D takes that as agreement; Will has, after all, never before denied him anything that was obtainable. He falls asleep quickly after that, but Will can’t do the same.

Will lays awake in bed, listening to D.

D is loud in his sleep. He snores and snorts and wheezes, all through the night, and sometimes he has coughing fits that are so violent that it wakes them both up.

It scared Will bad, back when he first brought D home, because he’d been afraid that the baby might die of it somehow - might choke to death or stop breathing in his sleep - but since then Will has gotten so used to hearing D struggle to breath in his sleep that it feels normal - almost comfortingly familiar, in a strange way that makes Will feel guilty for feeling that way.

Now though, it’s too painful to listen to.

Will gets out of bed and goes looking for Hannibal.

Chapter 12

Chapter by [PragmaticHominid](#)

Will finds Hannibal reading in front of the fire.

He's positioned two plush chairs a few feet away from the fireplace, and is leaning back in one with his legs crossed while he looks at the screen of his tablet.

Whatever Hannibal is looking at has his attention, but Will doesn't believe that he's so focused on the screen that he hasn't heard Will come in. Still, instead of looking up to greet him Hannibal pretends not to have noticed, waiting instead for Will to say hello.

The pretense is so transparent that it's *almost* honest. Will is starting to understand that this is Hannibal's way.

"Don't you ever sleep?" Will asks him.

"Not often," Hannibal says, lifting his head to meet Will's eyes. The brightly crackling flames dance across Hannibal's face, light and shadow crossing his features in erratic patterns.

He pauses, studying Will, and then he says, "D sleeps a great deal, but he doesn't sleep well, does he?"

"No," Will agrees, but reluctantly. It's easy to see where Hannibal is going with this.

"I could hear him through the wall of the hotel, snoring and choking and gasping his way through the night.

"My guess would be obstructive sleep apnea. That's extremely common among children with cleft palates."

Anxious, Will says, "Jed had the same problem, just not as bad. And D's just always slept like that. When he was littler I used to worry that he'd stop breathing and die in the night."

"He's young and resilient enough now that it probably won't kill him," Hannibal says. "But you're right to worry that he might stop breathing - that's exactly what's happening, probably many hundreds of times over the course of a night.

"It's bad for his heart, Will, and it's going to continue to take its toll in other ways as well."

"Is that why you were talking about surgeries and things with him?"

Hannibal considers the question. "Treating the cleft lip and palate may improve the situation, but that probably won't solve it. He'll need a CPAP machine to sleep restfully."

They keep piling up, all the things that D needs - that he should have had from the start - that Will couldn't give to him or do for him, things that Will didn't even know existed, and he says resentfully, "And you waited until *I* was asleep to start working on him, huh?"

"What do you mean?"

"You work on people until you get your way. I can tell that much already."

"Do you think that what I want is malicious?"

Will hesitates, caught between the obvious truth and his own fear and feelings.

"Maybe not," he allows, "at least when it comes to D. I'm not sure yet."

The fact that Hannibal doesn't offer further reassurance is, in its own way, reassuring, though Will knows that's another aspect of his manipulations - another way of guiding Will where he wants him to go.

"Sit down," Hannibal tells him, gesturing at the second chair.

Will sighs and climbs up onto it, realizing as he does so just how tired he is himself. The chair is soft, and the fire is warm, and Will fights the urge to close his eyes and instead just sits, his arms crossed, and refuses to look at Hannibal.

"Are you hungry?" Hannibal asks him.

"No."

It's a lie, but Hannibal lets it pass.

"D will need to have surgeries," he tells Will. "That is something that will have to happen. I'd be guilty of medical neglect otherwise, and his health would suffer for it."

"He doesn't need fixed," Will says. "There's nothing wrong with the way he looks."

"It isn't a matter of simple aesthetics," Hannibal tells him, and though his tone is gentle the man seems suddenly animated by an intensity that Will can't fully parse. "There are surgeries and prosthetics that will improve his life - that will make it easier for him to eat and speak and breathe.

"And there are cosmetic procedures that he might have, in order to look more normal."

Will opens his mouth to argue again on D's behalf, but Hannibal cuts him off. "Normality is not a goal that I've ever strived towards, beyond certain situations where it was useful or convenient to be perceived as 'normal,' and I wouldn't ask for normality from either of you.

"But if that's what D wants - if he wants to look normal - doesn't he have the right to make that choice for himself?"

Will's head hurts. He knows that Hannibal is working on *him* now, but it all makes sense, at least as far as Will can tell.

"I think that he will want that," Hannibal continues. "D wants very badly to be accepted by others. He needs that, I think, to a degree that neither of us can properly understand."

Hannibal leans forward and offers Will his tablet. "There's something else you should know as well."

Will takes it from him. The screen is filled by a picture of a very young baby with dark hair and a prominent cleft lip. There's no sentiment to the picture, with its close view of the baby's face and its sterile white background. It's nothing like the polaroids that Will's Mama took of him when he was a baby.

It's a medical picture, he will later come to understand, taken in order to document the baby's deformity.

"Is that D?" Hannibal asks.

Will isn't sure if he should lie or not. It's pointless to try, probably, so he says, "You know it is."

Hannibal takes the tablet away and says, "Francis Dolarhyde."

Will scowls at the ugly name. He says, "His name is D."

Hannibal offers no argument, but he nods before explaining that D's parents had been en route with him to see a specialist about his cleft lip and palate when they disappeared somewhere along the way.

"I'm surprised more effort wasn't taken to look for them, given the involvement of such a small child," Hannibal finishes.

"That's why we didn't usually take cars that had children in them. Maynard said that was dangerous - that all kinds of folks would drop everything to find a kid, even if they weren't kin. It's not like with adults. Adults can just decide that they want to go off somewhere else, and if people go long enough without finding the body most of them will decide that's what happened."

Hannibal says, "He was right about that much, more or less."

"I wasn't hitchhiking back then," Will tells him. "If I was, I'd have gotten in the car and noticed the baby and sent those people up a different fork in the road, but I was just..."

"You were the bait."

"I just stood in the road when they told me to so the cars would stop. I didn't know the baby was in there, not until the screaming woke him up and he started to cry."

"Yes," Hannibal says. "You've explained this before."

Will is angry all over again now, defensive and scared. The picture and the name attached to it has reawakened an old fear that is never silent for long; that someone will find out what Will did and take D away.

He is able to summon up enough trust in Hannibal to say, "You aren't going to make me give him back," without the words sounding too much like a plea or a threat.

"Of course we won't give him back."

"Never?"

"Not under any circumstances."

Hannibal recrosses his legs and smooths down the creases in his pajama bottoms.

"Regardless, his only living biological relative appears to have been his maternal grandmother, and she died almost a year ago. The obituary says it was dementia."

Despite all the reassurance, Will's heart is still pounding in his chest. He'd like to ask Hannibal for another valium, but he's afraid that he might say no.

Instead he says, "Can I have something to eat? I'm hungry."

He's still surprised at the pleasure with which Hannibal greets the idea of giving him something to eat. Will likes that. It's a clear sign that he has at least some control over the man's emotional state.

He likes not being hungry all the time, too, or worrying that D is.

When Will stands to follow Hannibal to the kitchen his bad leg protests, sending a bolt of pain down into his foot and all the way up through his knee to the ball of his hip. Will winces then glances toward Hannibal quickly to see if he noticed.

Hannibal is already in the kitchen, bent over to study the inside of the fridge, and Will limps after him, willing his leg to limber up.

The pain usually recedes, at least some, once he's walked on it for a while, but he hasn't really recovered from all the strain he put on it the night they left the mountain, and the ache doesn't seem to want to let him go.

Tentatively, Will says to Hannibal's back, "Is there maybe some way to fix my leg, do you think? An operation or something?"

Hannibal straightens and turns to look at him. "The growth plate might be permanently damaged," he cautions Will. "But the bone can be rebroken and set straight, and that will take a lot of the strain off your foot and joints. And we'll get you some orthopedic shoes with an elevated sole on one side, and that way you'll be able to walk just as though both your legs were the same length."

Will bites his lower lip, barely able to contend with the tangle of hope and doubts that the idea provokes.

“That all sounds real expensive,” he says at last.

“Don’t worry about that,” Hannibal tells him, and turns back to the fridge. “I’ll take care of you.

“Not just D, Will. You too.”

Chapter 13

Chapter by [PragmaticHominid](#)

Hannibal finds the borderline of Will's current ability to tolerate interactions with the world outside their little cabin in the woods, and stations himself and his plans for the boys directly at its edge.

He begins by scheduling an after-hours appointment at a local clinic, meeting with the office's young pediatrician, Beth Shaw, via video chat prior to making the appointment so he could evaluate her reaction as he briefed her on what to expect from the boys.

Near the end of the call Hannibal says, "I'm also concerned about blood borne pathogens," and Dr. Shaw returned his grave look and reassured him that she would add the additional test panels to the list of lab work to be done.

She's concluded, of course, that the thing Hannibal left unsaid during his summary of the hardship and neglect the boys experienced at the hands of their abusive caregivers was a history of sexual assault.

Hannibal let that ride, not only because she most likely wasn't wrong, but because allowing her to go forward with the belief that the issue was something as commonplace as that kept Will's most dangerous secrets hidden.

Now, arriving at the quiet office to greet Dr. Shaw face to face, Hannibal doesn't try to separate the boys. All four of them file into the same exam room.

She starts with Will first, because that's what Hannibal told her she ought to do, asking him to climb up on the exam table.

D looks around for somewhere else to sit, and finding the swivel stool next to the computer climbs up onto it. He makes a delighted sound when he realizes that the seat can turn from side to side. Will looks to his brother briefly, and a smile flashes across his troubled face, before his expression turns grim again and he goes back to focusing on the doctor and what she's saying to him.

"Roll your pants leg up and let me see that leg, first off," she tells Will. He does as instructed, holding the leg out for her begrudgingly.

"Okay," she says, more to herself than Will, prodding in a practiced way at his lower leg, fingers tracing the crooked break. "Okay."

She says, "Okay," again, three times in slow session, when she feels along the course of Will's spine.

He's silent and stock still as she examines his ribcage next. "Did you break a couple of your ribs, right here?" she asks, hand pausing over the spot.

Will's answer is short and unintelligible.

"You've really been through the ringer, huh?" she presses. Her accent is much softer than Will's own.

"I just fell out of a tree, is all," Will answers defensively. Hannibal is pleased to see him talking to anyone that isn't himself or D, no matter his tone. "It's not that big of a deal."

Dr. Shaw doesn't argue about it. She asks Will to lay back, and palpates his abdomen. "Okay," she says, but this time she says it in a way that makes Hannibal pay closer attention.

She looks at Hannibal and says, "He has an abdominal hernia."

It's the first issue she's come across that they didn't discuss prior to the appointment. Hannibal steps up to the exam table.

Sliding one hand under Will's lower back and spreading the other across his stomach, he says, "Sit up please, Will," and pushes up against his back so the boy doesn't twist as he does so.

Hannibal feels a bulge in Will's abdominal wall, just an inch or so above his navel.

"You're right," he tells the pediatrician.

Will's eyes are big, darting between the two of them. He feels hemmed in, and Hannibal steps back to give him room.

Behind them, D asks, "Is that bad?"

Not understanding, Dr. Shaw looks to Hannibal for a translation.

"No," Hannibal says, addressing neither the pediatrician or D, but instead Will. "It could become bad if we ignore it, but it's not all that bad now. Repairing it will take only a very small surgery."

"Everything's surgeries with you," Will grumbles under his breath, too low for D to hear.

Hannibal thinks that's rather unfair, but he simply says, "You can get down now," and turns back to D.

"Your turn," he tells D, who scrambles up onto the table without need of further encouragement.

D's exam goes more smoothly, both because the boy doesn't seem to mind being here and because aside from the cleft palate he appears to suffer from no major injuries or ailments.

When they move to the phlebotomy room, D hurries in front of Will and climbs into the blood draw chair first. Hannibal wonders about that - does he think that in doing so he's in some way helping Will, or is he simply eager to remain the center of Dr. Shaw's attention?

Hannibal thinks the latter.

Regardless, it's lucky that D goes first. The pediatrician manages well enough with him.

She doesn't seem especially shaken by the death glare Will gives her when D squeaks in surprised pain when she inserts the needle to draw blood.

Her attention is on D, who looks like he is considering crying. She heads that off by asking, "What shows do you like?"

"Pokémon," he says, rather woundedly.

Dr. Shaw doesn't understand what he said, but she's a good actor. "I have Band-Aids here with characters from a lot of different shows on them. Give me a minute and I'll show you, okay?"

"Okay," D repeats. The array of colorful cartoon Band-Aids she offers him when she's finished drawing blood seems to go some distance toward smoothing over his hurt feelings. He hands her back the one he wants, and she puts it on for him, and then moves to the other shoulder to give him his vaccines.

"Couple quick pokes and then you can pick another Band-Aid, okay?" she tells him, and has already finished before he can even nod in assent.

When it's Will's turn, however, she can't find a vein.

"Sorry," she mutters, withdrawing the needle, "let me try again." But she has no better luck the second time. Will is still and silent; he's gone away, hiding somewhere inside himself from the closeness of the adult and the pain as she hunts for a vein, shifting the needle beneath his skin - too used to being hurt to be outraged and too accustomed to hiding that hurt to complain.

Dr. Shaw is starting to get flustered. "I'll try the other arm," she says apologetically, and Will sighs but doesn't say anything.

"I'll do it," Hannibal says, and takes the job over.

The arrow wound still makes bending an inadvisable prospect, so Hannibal crouches beside Will instead. He takes the boy's thin arm by the wrist, repositioning it. His thumb lingers over the pulse point, curious as to if Will's rabbit heart will pick up or settle down in response to Hannibal being so close to him, but it's pounding so quickly that it's hard to say.

"You're alright," he tells Will, surprised all over again by the intensity of the sympathy he feels for the boy; how personal it feels, almost as though it were his own heart hammering away inside his chest. "We'll be done in a few minutes."

He draws the blood from Will's wrist instead of his forearm, and when he's done D has already picked out a Band-Aid for him to wear.

“We didn’t need to come here,” Will grouses a little later, while they wait outside the bathroom for D. “You could have done all of this yourself.”

“I could have,” Hannibal agrees.

Up to this point Hannibal has handled all of their immediate medical needs, aside from the x-rays and medication the hospital provided Will with in response to the minor skull fracture he incurred during their escape from the mountain.

He’s been giving the boys a broad-spectrum antibiotic to clear out the host of low-level infections that lurk within their systems. He’s also begun Will on paroxetine, in order to help him control the obsessive anxiety that can so easily tip over into unplanned violence, and without divulging that Will is already on that medication has convinced Dr. Shaw to write him a prescription.

“But it’s not typically considered advisable for a doctor to treat his own family members; the courts will look more favorably on the situation if it can be demonstrated that I’ve allowed neutral outsiders to tend to your medical needs rather than doing it all myself.”

Less willingly, he admits, “And there are areas of medicine in which I have little experience. I could have handled everything tonight on my own, but for example the dentist D is seeing next week will be able to bring to bear skills, as well as equipment, that I don’t have.”

“And I have to get accustomed to all of this,” Will says, and in his voice Hannibal hears the ghost of his own accent.

That isn’t new. With every day that passes, Hannibal hears more of the timbre and patterns of his own voice creeping into Will’s voice.

Hannibal wonders if the mimicry is subconscious, or if the boy is doing it intentionally.

Chapter 14

Chapter by [PragmaticHominid](#)

Chapter Notes

Wanted to get this one done yesterday as a birthday present to myself, but ended up being super sick instead.

Feeling better now, knock wood, and I'm happy that I got it done.

Hope yall enjoy! <3

“This is easier than I expected,” Hannibal says, as he clips the little white sensor to D’s finger.

Hannibal has already explained that the sensor, which fits around the tip of D’s finger like a set of toothless jaws, is meant to monitor D’s pulse and blood oxygenation while he sleeps.

The “blood” part of that worried Will, but when he asked about it Hannibal reassured him that the sensor wouldn’t take any of D’s blood, and explained in terms that Will more or less understood what it actually did and why it was important.

Still, Will examined the sensor carefully to make sure there were no hidden needles or sharp bits inside it before he let Hannibal put it on D.

The little sensor has a wire attached to it, which leads down to another device, this one about the size of a cell phone, which is attached to a stretchy belt that Hannibal has already fastened around D’s chest, over his pajama top. Another of the belts is wrapped around his middle and has its own wire that connects it back to the chest unit.

“The technology has improved so quickly,” Hannibal adds.

Will doesn’t know anything about that, but the at-home sleep apnea test seems harmless so far. He continues to watch from the edge of his lower bunk as Hannibal crouches to attach a length of clear tubing to the chest device before slipping a loop of the tubing over D’s head like a crown.

“This little prong goes in your nose,” Hannibal explains, positioning it. Will isn’t quite sure that the split prong fits into D’s flat nose the way it’s supposed to, but Hannibal seems satisfied.

“All done - as simple as that,” he says, and lifts D up to the top bunk.

D fusses at Will a little about the tubing, after Hannibal's turned off the lights and went away, but Will tells him, "You'd better just leave it there. It's for your own good," and if D messes around with any of the test getup over the course of the night Will doesn't see him do it.

The CPAP machine comes in the mail a few days later. Looking at the headgear, with all the straps and the clear plastic mask, Will thinks, *There's no way he'll keep that on through the night.*

D's desire to keep Will - and, increasingly, Hannibal - happy with him will only extend so far, he thinks. But, at least in this case, Will is wrong about that.

It's hard for D to keep from crying when he's told that he can't sleep on the top bunk anymore.

He snuffles as he works to hold back disappointed tears, knowing that he can't fool Will, who is trying to hide his own more complicated frustrations by remaining grimly focused on taking the rubber sheet from the mattress on the top bunk and putting it on the lower one instead.

D is less certain about Hannibal, who doesn't pause in his explanation that the machine needs to sit level with D's body, or look away from the job of setting it up on the bedside table.

The headgear is scarier than the stuff Hannibal had him wear for the test, but once Hannibal shows him how to undo and tighten the velcro straps it starts to feel less intimidating.

D doesn't think it will be easy to fall asleep - it never has been, and the facemask is an added distraction - but the gentle hum and woosh of the machine is surprisingly soothing, and before very long he starts to drift off.

And then... there's nothing. None of his usual fits and starts as his body struggles to balance its need for rest with its hunger for air. No choking gasps jerk him up from sleep. No coughing fits rouse him.

He just sleeps. As simple as that.

And when morning rolls around he comes up from sleep slowly. At first he isn't entirely sure where he is, alone in the soft clean bed, but that's okay. He is fully present in his body, mystified by the absence of pain; D's chest doesn't ache and his throat doesn't feel scratchy and raw.

But as he comes all the way awake D realizes that it isn't just that he doesn't hurt.

He feels *okay* .

He feels, for maybe the first time in his life, *well-rested* .

Rolling onto his back and stretching languidly, D looks up and sees Will looking down at him from the top bunk.

Will looks tired.

“Hi,” D tries to say, but the mask muffles his voice, so he takes it off and tries again.

“Hi,” Will repeats. “You sleep okay?”

There’s something funny about Will’s tone.

“Yeah,” D says, eager to be believed. “I slept real good. I feel good.”

He smiles up at Will, as widely as he can, to prove it. D doesn’t know it, but from this angle Will can see past his missing row of upper front teeth to the fissure in the roof of D’s mouth.

“Good,” Will says. “I’m glad.”

He isn’t lying. D can tell that Will really is happy and relieved, but that isn’t all there is to it.

There are a lot of things brewing in Will that D doesn’t have the tool set to properly understand.

The closest he can get is to ask, tentatively, aware that he is on the wrong track but at a loss for what he’s missed, “Are you mad at me?”

Will’s face drops. “No - of course not,” he says, shaking his head so vehemently in denial that his hair falls into his face, obscuring it.

“You mad at Hannibal?”

“No,” Will says, almost as quickly.

“Then what’s wrong?”

Will draws his head back from over the edge of the top bunk, so D can’t see him anymore.

“I’m a little mad at myself, I guess,” Will says, moving towards the bunk bed’s ladder. “And I know I probably shouldn’t be, but I can’t help it.”

Almost as soon as D starts using the CPAP machine, he begins to fret about losing it.

“What if it gets broken?” D asks Will, a few nights later. “What if I break it?”

“Be careful with it,” Will tells him. “But if something happens to it we’ll get you another.”

Hannibal will get you one, he means, of course, and Will is pretty sure that’s true. Hannibal has gotten them both laptop computers, and Will has done a little bit of snooping around to find out how much the CPAP machine costs.

Will has no clear idea of the value of a dollar, but in his experience food is worth almost any price, and so it's staggering to him to learn that the little machine cost more than twenty or maybe even thirty of the big room service meals they'd ordered back at the hotel.

None of it seems to faze Hannibal, but Will can't stop worrying about it.

He's grateful to Hannibal in a way he can't begin to articulate for getting D the machine, and for everything else he's made happen, but shaking the sense that he's incurring an unpayable debt won't fade away.

That foreboding, along with D's new and nearly silent way of sleeping, has taken a toll on Will's ability to rest. He keeps almost slipping down into sleep, then jerking back awake at the sudden re-awareness that he can't hear D's habitual snoring.

That happens now.

Will turns and looks down over the edge of the bed, staring intently by the dim green glow of the bulbasaur nightlight until he sees D twitch in his sleep.

Only then, when he is sure that D has not stopped breathing, does the tightness in Will's own chest let up.

Relieved, Will climbs down from bed and pads his way out into the hall.

He finds Hannibal in the kitchen, frying up sausages for breakfast.

His back is to Will, but he can tell by the set of Hannibal's shoulders that he's in a good mood.

"Hey," Will says from the doorway, fully aware that Hannibal already knows he's here, no matter how quiet Will tried to be, but playing along.

Hannibal turns to greet him, spatula in hand.

"The bloodwork came back," he tells Will. "All negative."

Will, who hadn't been entirely sure about what became of the blood taken from himself and D, swallows against a sudden lump in his throat. "That bad?" he asks.

"No," Hannibal says. "In this context, negative is good news."

The tightness in Will's throat is replaced by a less localized sense of annoyance.

"You could have said that to start with."

Hannibal, who has turned back to the stove, ignores this.

"I'd been worried," Hannibal tells him, as Will steps further into the kitchen. "It's important to be careful with any meat, but especially the sort your family was relying upon. It's better if

you can get it from someone whom you know to be in good health, and even then it should be handled in a very specific way and cooked thoroughly.”

Will comes closer, staring at the sausages, bubbling in the hot skillet in their own grease. They came from the store, he knows, in a package that was marked PORK, but he figured out a while ago that with Hannibal that isn’t always going to be the case.

Will’s stomach grumbles.

“I very much doubt that such precautions were ever taken on the mountain,” he continues, turning the sausages and then putting down the spatula to crack three eggs into the skillet. “But the two of you have been lucky, and are free of any bloodborne diseases.”

“What’s that mean?”

“You need care, the both of you, but you aren’t physically sick in any way that would undermine your ability to have full and happy lives.”

Will has trouble finding the words to respond to that, and in any case Hannibal doesn’t seem to be waiting for an answer.

“Go wake your brother up,” he says, turning back to Will to nod toward the doorway. “Breakfast will be ready in a few minutes.”

Chapter 15

Chapter by [PragmaticHominid](#)

Hannibal is being cautious with the benzodiazepines, but he lets Will have a Valium on the morning of D's dentist appointment.

It does him some good, but the tension coiled in Will's body is still evident as he sits across from Hannibal in the waiting room, staring at the door through which D was taken. Complex emotions, none of them good, twitch across Will's face whenever he forgets to guard it.

Hannibal makes only a token effort at conversation, and is deterred by a sharp shake of Will's head and a muttered, "I'm trying to hear."

He is listening, Hannibal knows, for any signs of trouble on the other side of the exam room door.

When the dentist finally ushers D out into the hallway the boy looks tired but otherwise fine. Will and Hannibal rise as one to meet them, and while Hannibal listens to what the dentist has to tell him, he hears Will ask D quietly, "You alright?" to which D nods.

He has, Hannibal's noticed, increasingly taken to avoiding speaking in public.

D reaches for Hannibal's hand as they cross the waiting room toward the exit, and Hannibal lets him have it.

In the reflection of the clinic's glass door he sees Will, who is walking a few steps behind them, pause. Hannibal watches him worry about it, but after a moment Will decides that it's okay and hurries after them again.

When Hannibal lets them into the backseat of the car D slides in close to Will and leans his head against his shoulder.

"How'd that go?" Hannibal hears Will press, as he closes the backdoor and circles around to slide behind the steering wheel. Hannibal can tell how careful his tone is, how hard he is trying to hide his own feelings to avoid worrying D.

"Okay," D says, either unaware of Will's anxiety or so used to it that it doesn't register. "They made a dental impression," he continues, enunciating the last two words carefully. He's been practicing them, Hannibal knows. "Like Hannibal said they would.

"But the prosthetic won't be ready for a while, I guess," he adds, less happily. "I hope they hurry."

It's dark in their bedroom when Will hears D un-velcro his CPAP mask.

The *whooshing* of the machine is a soft background noise as D asks, "Will? You awake?"

"Yeah," Will says, though he'd been more than halfway towards drifting off.

"Is Wasco going to come and get us?"

The question shakes all the drowsiness out of Will.

"No," he says.

"You sure?"

"He can't. He's in jail."

That isn't technically true, according to Hannibal, but the distinction between the state institution and jail did not strike him as meaningful.

"What about Maynard and them?"

"Maynard's dead," Will says, as patiently as his own anxiety allows.

D saw Maynard die, but he seems to have forgotten a lot of what happened that night, and what he remembers is sometimes different from what Will saw. The fact of death - the permanency of it - doesn't seem real to his brother in the way it is for Will.

He wonders if that's because D is so young, or if there might be another reason for it, and makes a mental note to ask Hannibal about it.

"Jed and Soncy are dead too," Will adds, in case he's forgotten.

None of that seems to upset D. It just makes him pensive, and as though to explain himself D says, "I was worrying that Wasco might come around and want us to go back before my prosthetic was done."

Then, following a line of thought that Will is too worn out to properly follow, D says, "Do you think Wasco is mad at Hannibal?"

The complications of that question and the host of emotions it evokes in Will might have taken hours to lay out, but Will thinks for a minute and just says, "I don't think Hannibal cares much, one way or another, about what Wasco thinks."

"Yeah, but I don't want him to try and eat Hannibal."

Will feels his heart jump up into his throat and then slink back down and try to hide behind his liver.

"Don't say silly things like that," he says, struggling to keep his voice steady. "Nobody is coming for us. We're going to stay with Hannibal - I've already told you that."

“Okay,” D says, with drowsy relief.

Satisfied, he puts his mask back on, and when Will looks over the edge of the bunk maybe ten minutes later he can tell that D’s asleep.

It takes Will a long time, laying still while his mind races, before he can do the same.

When the prosthetic arrives they go back to the dentist’s office to check that it fits properly, and this time Will and Hannibal go back into the exam room with D.

The denture part of it has six straight white teeth to cover the gap in his upper jaw. A pink bit, modeled to fit over the hole in the top of his mouth, is attached to the denture.

The dentist lets D hold the prosthetic while he explains how to clean it and what to do with it when D isn’t wearing it and all sorts of things that D barely hears. He is worried, holding it, that he might accidentally break it, or drop it, or that it might be snatched out of his hand and taken away, or that it won’t fit right, but when the dentist puts a little bit of denture glue on it and mimes how D should put it on he finds it slips perfectly over his gums.

He runs his tongue over the backs of the fake teeth, then prods at the roof of his mouth with it, feeling the new flatness there.

The other three are all watching him, D realizes, just as the dentist holds up a mirror for him to look at himself.

It looks like he has the right number of teeth now, at least, but the prosthetic does nothing to hide the clefts in his lip or fix his flattened nose. Hannibal told him that from the start, of course, and the dentist explained it when he was making the imprint too, but D’s imagination outran the import of those warnings, and he is startled now by his own disappointment.

But he makes himself smile at the looking glass, though doubtfully, to try to keep from disappointing everyone else.

Chapter 16

Chapter by [PragmaticHominid](#)

Chapter Notes

Just a little one this time. I didn't have any suitable scenes to pair it with, and I felt like this part can and should stand on its own.

In the following weeks, Will oscillates wildly between enjoying the security Hannibal offers and a resentful terror that it won't last, so much so that Will cannot predict or explain his own moods. His anxiety builds as too many days pass where Hannibal doesn't hurt them, not even once, days which are too good - where Will catches himself feeling too happy.

The pressure increases as he keeps waiting for the Bad Thing to happen, but Will tries to hide his own certainty that it must be coming, and in that silence the fear builds to a point that for long stretches of hours and even days it's all that Will feels.

His heart starts to pound every time Hannibal walks past their bedroom door. Panic takes him by the throat whenever D is alone in the bathroom, every time a delivery driver pulls up to the cabin to drop off a load of groceries, every time the TV turns on unexpectedly.

After a certain point the fear inevitably shifts into anger, and Will starts to feel that Hannibal is playing a game with him, torturing Will by making him wait for the other shoe to drop, until Will is so stressed out and pissed off that he explodes at Hannibal.

That ratcheting up sense that all of this is too good to be real, and that it will all turn ugly sooner rather than later, always lets up a little when Hannibal doesn't respond by beating Will or turning him and D out.

He doesn't try to kill Will, regardless of what he does or says, though Will knows that he could if he wanted to.

Will feels better for a while then, reassured and as close to safe as he knows how to feel, until the doubts and anxiety starts to creep back up on him.

It's a cycle that he can't seem to break, made all the more difficult by the fear that letting his guard down would be dangerous for himself and D, and he and Hannibal are setting up together in front of the fire one night when Hannibal asks him, "You're starting to get angry again. Why is that?"

Will strives towards an honest answer, if only because he feels compelled to test Hannibal yet again. "I guess I was just enjoying being here so much that I forgot for a while that sooner or later you're going to hurt me." It's not a full answer to Hannibal's question, but Will waits to

see if he'll reach across the coffee table to backhand him, or maybe pick up the fire poker and try to use it on him, but Hannibal is still.

Only Hannibal's eyes move, his gaze shifting away from his face to the crackling fire, and Will wonders if that's an admission of guilt.

After a pause Will adds, "Maybe I'm just angry at me for letting myself forget that."

"You don't believe yourself to be deserving of comfort," Hannibal says. His expression is inscrutable, but the shadows of the flames that dance across his face seem to animate it. "Or of safety. You refuse therefore to accept it."

Will tries to control his own face, but has very little luck. It's never occurred to Will to think about his own situation on those terms, but now that Hannibal has articulated it he has a sinking suspicion that he's right, and not for the first time that day tears sting his eyes.

"I don't trust it," Will says, swiping angrily at his wet eyes with the end of his sleeve. "Not any of this. I can't."

"You will," Hannibal tells him, "given enough time."

Chapter 17

Chapter by [PragmaticHominid](#)

Will's orthopedic shoes arrive in the mail a few days after D gets his dental plate, and at first Will doesn't want to wear them.

He's worked out a very specific gait to accommodate the badly healed break to his left leg, walking on curled toes and the edge of his foot. The shoes throw that off, leaving him feeling literally off-balance.

"Feels like I'm learning to walk all over again," he grouches to Hannibal, teetering his way across the living room carpet as he struggles to trust his weight on the three-inch raised sole of the left shoe.

"That's exactly what you're doing," Hannibal answers, as though it was a question. Hannibal is damnably amicable, especially when he's getting his way, and sometimes it's enough to make Will want to pull out his own hair, but he keeps practicing with the shoes anyway.

Will already has plenty of calluses, but it turns out that few of them are in the right places for the shoes, and he ends up with blisters. They are such small hurts that might not have even noticed them a month ago, when scratches and bruises and backhanded blows were as common as dirt in his life, but somehow they stand out more now.

Hannibal gives him antibacterial cream and special Band-Aids, and children's aspirin when he overdoes things and the usual ache in his leg ratchets up in intensity.

To help strengthen his leg and to retrain it to move normally they start going on longer walks in the woods, eventually building to hikes in which they follow the trails for hours.

The number of healthy animals they spot during these walks amazes Will. On the mountain there were hardly any birds, but the forest here is alight with them, and Hannibal is pleased to offer the names of nearly every kind of bird that they spot.

Most of the many things that Hannibal buys are delivered directly to the cabin, and a few weeks after Will's shoes came in the mail Hannibal calls the boys into the kitchen to watch him open one of the almost daily packages.

"We're going fishing," he tells them cheerfully, taking the new fishing rods out of the box and laying them on the counter. There's a lot of other things in the box, a tackle box and a retractable net and stuff Will doesn't recognize.

He shares a troubled look with D.

"Maynard's the only one in the family who fished," he says. "We don't like it. It makes our bellies hurt."

“You’ll like it the way I cook it,” Hannibal says, and Will feels dubious about that but he goes along with the excursion.

The sleek, healthy fish that they pull out of the stream surprise Will, though probably they shouldn’t have.

“The fish on the mountain didn’t look like this,” Will says. “They had tumors, and sometimes big sores.”

“Pollutants in the water,” Hannibal says, almost absently.

“Maynard used to catch a whole lot of them and then put them on racks to smoke them, but half the time they seemed to just rot instead of drying out

“It’s funny, thinking about it now,” he continues, speaking more softly so D won’t hear. “It was Maynard who was always demanding that we take more cars, but afterwards he wouldn’t eat the meat. He’d just eat his rotten fish, and then sometimes he’d take the money we got from the cars and go into town to get things.”

“He didn’t share any of the things he bought?”

Sometimes he’d give me something if I was good, but... there started to be strings attached, and I stopped wanting to go to see him.”

Hannibal doesn’t press for more information, at least not now, and Will is grateful for that, though he still isn’t convinced that there aren’t hidden strings attached to everything Hannibal has done for himself and his brother up to this point.

“Your uncles might not have known any better, but Maynard must have been aware that there were better ways to put food on the table.

“There’s food pantries. Church kitchens. Any and all of your uncles would have easily qualified for disability benefits from a young age. SSDI payments are pitifully small, but it would have offered a dependable income as well as free medical care, and usually include what used to be called food snaps.

“There’s no reason for his children to have been living like that, let alone the pair of you.”

What’s your reason for doing it, then? Will thinks, but doesn’t ask. Hannibal has hinted at bad times in his own childhood, a lost sibling that he wasn’t able to save, but Will has trouble believing that he has ever killed another human being out of the pure desperate need to fill his own belly.

In fact, though it’s hard for Will to be certain given his inexperience with life beyond Bear Mountain, he has begun to suspect that Hannibal might be richer than God.

As soon as they get back to the cabin Will goes to take a shower.

It's his second today.

Will never fully realized how badly he smelled until he had a chance to get away from the stink. Now he's obsessed with the shower, and with the array of shampoo bottles and creams and tonics that have proliferated in their bathroom.

Only a handful of those bottles are meant for himself and D, but sometimes Will gets into Hannibal's things. He does not know why he does this, aside from that there is a comfort in smelling like Hannibal, and now he opens the aftershave and dabs some on his cheeks and under his chin.

He has found himself copying Hannibal in other ways too. Each new little habit he picks up - how to hold a fork or sit in a chair, turns of phrase or ways of moderating his own expressions - makes Will feel a little bit safer, a little more impervious to the dangers of the outside world.

Will finishes getting dressed in a clean change of clothing, but he doesn't put his shoes back on.

He limps, silently, to the end of the hall, and through the doorway watches as Hannibal teaches D how to clean the fish.

As difficult as it has been to trust Hannibal's intentions, Will no longer worries that he might intentionally hurt D. Hannibal is so much better equipped to take care of him than Will ever was, and watching them now he wonders if D will begin to love Hannibal more than he loves Will.

Putting the last of the filleted fish into a glass tray, Hannibal turns the facet on with the edge of his wrists and waits while D gets up on the step stool to wash his hands. When he's finished Hannibal takes his own turn, saying over his shoulder to D, "Get the milk, please," as he scrubs up.

D moves quickly to do as he's told, eager as always to please, and by the time Hannibal is drying his hands on a kitchen towel he has gotten the milk from the fridge and is holding it out for Hannibal to take.

Hannibal does so. He twists off the lid and pours milk over the fish.

Will steps forward, curious. "Why are you doing that?" he asks.

"The milk leaches out much of the fishy taste and odor," Hannibal explains, "giving it a milder flavor. I do think you'll like it, Will."

He does, of course.

After dinner, Hannibal sends D to their bedroom to play video games, while Will helps him clean up the kitchen.

Once they have been alone for a few minutes, Hannibal says with deceptive casualness that in no way fools Will, “It’s been two months since we helped each other escape the mountain.”

“That so?” Will says. He hasn’t been counting the days, but the flow of time has seemed to go oddly since they left the mountain, and that sounds like both too short a time and too long.

“Two months to the day,” Hannibal agrees. He’d been busy scrubbing a dirty plate, but now his hands grow still. Staring down into the cloudy water he asks, “Do you still... intend to stay with me?”

There’s an intense vulnerability to him, as he asks this, though Will could not consciously describe what cues exactly communicate this to him.

I could hurt him, Will realizes. I could hurt him just about as bad as he is capable of being hurt.

“Where else would we go?” Will asks, trying to make it sound off hand - to communicate to Hannibal exactly how silly the question is.

Hannibal nods slowly, accepting that. His hands go back to work.

“In that case, I think I’ll go visit your uncle soon,” he says. “There’s some loose ends that still need tying up.”

After dinner the boys want to go out again, and Hannibal takes them down to the lake to swim.

The lake is empty when they get there, as it often is, given that this is not the lodge’s busy season, but about half an hour later a small group of children with two accompanying adults arrive at the water’s edge.

Without any discussion between them, Will and D leave the water. They hurry over the beach chair Hannibal is resting in, and Will tells him, “We want to go home now.”

In the long run, avoidance will serve neither of them well, but for now it’s better than potential conflict, and Hannibal makes no argument.

On the walk back to the cabin, they come upon a woman walking a small beagle on a leash.

It’s the first dog they’ve seen in the nearly vacant campgrounds, and it frightens D. When Hannibal comes to a stop to let the dog and its owner pass by on the narrow trail, the boy ducks behind Hannibal’s legs for protection, hiding behind him, but Will is fascinated.

He steps into the stranger’s path, shy but determined, and asks, “Can I pet your dog?”

“Sure,” the woman says, and Will crouches down and offers the dog his hand, seeming to know by instinct how to approach it.

All told, they spend less than three minutes in the company of the animal, but Will is excited without being anxious for the rest of the evening.

When morning comes he’s eager for their walk, speculating repeatedly over the breakfast table on if they might encounter the woman and her dog again.

Hannibal takes note of all of this, and stores it away for future use.

Chapter 18

Chapter by [PragmaticHominid](#)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Good afternoon,” Hannibal says, and sits down across the table from Wasco.

The metal stools on which they both sit are bolted to the floor, as is the metal table between them.

In a sense Wasco too is bolted down, the shackles arounds his wrists attached to a bracket welded to his side of the table.

The therapy room contains no other adornments. The windowless walls are as grey as the concrete floors, and the air is damp and scented with something that smells unpleasantly of rot.

There are no security cameras in the room, but Hannibal is conscious that it is not beyond possibility that the room is bugged, and therefore he intends to pick his words carefully as they proceed.

The other man does not return his greeting, and Hannibal presses, “Have you been well?”

There’s no reply, not so much as a giggle. Wasco simply glares up at him from beneath his heavy brow ridge with glassy, bloodshot eyes.

When Hannibal takes the panic button, which he has been instructed to keep in his lap at all times, and sits it at the edge of the table to the left, Wasco’s eyes track the movement before rising again to meet Hannibal’s own.

Hannibal was concerned that he’d find the man medicated halfway to catatonia, but those eyes are sharp.

He is, Hannibal believes, as close to lucid as he is capable of being.

The silence drags on. Hannibal waits, hands folded on the table in front of him, his face placid.

Wasco breaks first. “What do you want?”

Hannibal smiles. He reaches for the folder that he brought with him, and takes out a legal form and a soft-tipped marker. “I want you to grant me legal custody of Will and D,” he explains, though that is only one facet of what has brought him here today.

“I already gave ‘em over to you.”

“You have,” Hannibal agrees. “Now you just have to sign the paperwork.”

Without a notary the document is not legally binding, of course, and it will hardly cement Hannibal’s custody of the boys, given that Wasco is in no position, on multiple levels, to determine what becomes of them, but it might help to smooth the way.

The document is, in any case, more of a pretext - an entry point for a more complicated negotiation. Maybe Wasco is already wise to that, because he transforms from uncooperative to sly.

“Maybe D ain’t mine to give away,” he suggests, his eyes narrowed speculatively.

“Of course he is,” Hannibal says, and this is perhaps the trickiest part; a lot hinges on Wasco’s willingness to get on board with the story Hannibal has told the police - including, whether or not Wasco realizes, his own life. “You can’t give me one brother and not the other. They come as a pair. Splitting him up from his brother would destroy Will.”

Wasco leans as far back on his stool as the chains will allow. “Don’t make any difference,” he says. “D still ain’t mine.”

He makes Hannibal wait, bending forward to chew at length on one of his fingernails. The hospital has allowed - or maybe forced - him to clean up considerably. Dressed now in scrubs and soft-soled shoes, most of the filth has been washed away, but the state of his fingernails is still absolutely vile.

Straightening, he spits a gnawed off chunk of nail onto the table between them and continues, “That’s Jed’s boy.”

Hannibal thinks back to the man Alana beat to death with the toilet tank lid. “Same facial deformity,” Hannibal observes.

“Sure. Takes after him.”

It’s good to see that Wasco understands the point of this line of conversation, even if he’s being difficult about it. He can see where some of Will’s intelligence comes from, though in this man it’s never evolved above a type of base cunning.

“And who was D’s mother?”

For the first time since Hannibal stepped into the therapy room, Wasco laughs. The sound is grating. “Can’t recall that any of us ever bothered to ask her name.”

Hannibal regards him. Wasco is lying, he’s quite sure, either as an attempt to scandalize Hannibal or to throw a wrench in the story after all; If D is the son of some tortured captive it would mean that he might have other relatives out in the wider world that might, upon being found, seek to claim him. That’s hardly better than the reality of the boy being a stolen child.

Quietly, Hannibal asks, “Is that how it was with Will’s mother?”

The anger, which has been strumming beneath Wasco's skin since Hannibal entered the room, breaks to the surface now. He's livid, but Hannibal is surprised to see that Wasco doesn't fight against his chains to try to get at him.

The rage burns out quickly. Maybe that's the medication; maybe he's already done the math himself and knows that, firstly, he will not be able to reach Hannibal to harm him, and secondly if he did the repercussions would be bad for both himself and the boys; or maybe he's just used to being under someone else's thumb, and is rolling over for Hannibal the way that he did for Maynard right up until the one time he didn't.

He'd killed his own father to protect D. He'll do what Hannibal wants now to keep the boys safe.

He looks down at the table. He's quiet, for a time. He doesn't cry, but he gnaws at his own lower lip hard enough to make it bleed. Hannibal wonders if the taste of human blood, even his own, is a comfort to him.

"The family used to be bigger," he says, without looking up. It's harder to understand him while he's muttering into his own chest, but Hannibal has had a lot of practice from listening to D, who unlike Will spoke exclusively and by necessity the dialectic they seem to have devolved to accommodate Jed's cleft lip and palate, and Hannibal manages to follow along.

"She was one of us," he continues, and seems not shamed but only sorrowful at the admission. Hannibal wonders if he is even aware of the incest taboos that exist within nearly every human culture.

He lifts his head to meet Hannibal's eyes, staring at him steadily as he lies. "Both them boys came from her."

"Half-brothers then."

Wasco's head bobs on his twisted shoulders in a half-hearted nod in agreement.

"Did she die?"

"Yeah," Wasco says flatly. "I guess that was about six months after she had D."

"I talked my Daddy to go into town to get him milk," Wasco continues, warming a little in response to better memories. "Hard to convince him, but I had to; Will's a good boy, he never asks for much of anything, but he wanted that little baby to be alright."

"Maynard said that the formula was unnatural, but it didn't seem to do D any harm; cute little thing grew like a weed, right from the start."

"He'll be big," Hannibal agrees, "like his father," but there's rage burning in his own guts now, kindled by the proud, almost approval-seeking way Wasco spoke of doing the absolute bare minimum.

So much of D's relative health, size included, came at *Will's* expense, because *Will* was working so hard to keep him alive, even when that required sacrificing his own wellbeing.

Despite that effort, they were both malnourished and underweight when they came to Hannibal.

“You’re next of kin, in that case,” Hannibal says coldly. “So you can sign.”

Wasco sees his anger, even if he doesn’t understand it, and responds in kind.

“You greedy sonofabitch. Killed everything that was mine and took the rest. Now you want more -”

“I want the boys to be safe,” Hannibal tells him, refusing to rise to the bait. “Don’t you?”

Wasco doesn’t answer. He only glares.

Hannibal holds his gaze until the other man makes a sharp, nervous laugh, almost like the cry of a kicked dog, and looks away.

“Do you want them to end up in a place like this?” Hannibal presses. “Will is in many particular ways fragile. D is too beholden to what other people tell him about himself for his own good. Think about what will happen to them.”

Wasco says, “I can handle this place just fine. I’ve seen worse.” The vague bravado in that is an effort to maintain at least some of his pride, and Hannibal lets him keep it, because the next thing he says is, “But it’s a bad place for kids.”

“It is. I can keep them out of it, but you and I have to be careful about things.”

There’s a long pause, then almost reluctantly Wasco asks, “They doing alright?”

Hannibal takes a picture from his folder and slides across the table to Wasco, who stares at it hard.

Will consented that the photo be shared with his ‘uncle.’ D simply was not consulted in the matter.

“Making them over to be like you, huh?” he asks, in a peculiar tone that Hannibal can’t quite read. Hannibal, who is increasingly confident that Will will grow to have a great deal in common with himself, doesn’t answer.

“They’re saying that I killed that woman who was with you... I don’t remember her name.”

“Alana Bloom,” Hannibal says without inflection.

“Yeah. They keep telling me I killed her. I killed a lot of folks, but I know that I didn’t kill her.”

Hannibal says. “I suppose it was Maynard.”

“Must have been,” Wasco says. “I wasn’t me.”

“Frankly, that’s a relief,” Hannibal says, “knowing that it wasn’t you. She was my friend.”

“Right,” Wasco says, his eyes narrowed. “Give me the damned paper.”

Hannibal hands the document over, along with the soft-tipped marker that is the closest thing to a pen inmates are allowed to have.

He is uncertain as to whether or not Wasco is literate, and gets no clear answer to that question now; Wasco pays no mind whatsoever to what is written on the paper, but simply finds the signature line at the bottom and scrawls his name across it.

“I’m going to work on getting you transferred to a better facility,” Hannibal says, when he hands the paper back. “Somewhere closer to where I and the boys will be living.

“Perhaps someday Will may choose to come visit you.”

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter is the final in this story. However there is a third, longer and more plot-heavy, story that I hope to finish this series out with.

Chapter 19

Chapter by [PragmaticHominid](#)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Will is less angry than he used to be.

Sometimes, when they sit up together at night, he still says or does things to test Hannibal's patience, waiting anxiously to see what he will do in response, but most of the time the talk is easy.

Hannibal talks more than any adult that Will has ever known, and more remarkably he talks to D and Will as though they are fully capable of understanding what he has to say, though they have a mutual understanding that there are some things that are not to be discussed in D's hearing. Will isn't sure how much D understood about their former family's livelihood, or Will's own role in that system, but Hannibal has reassured him that there is a good chance that his brother is young enough that he will forget much of it, given enough time.

"Do you think I'll forget?" Will asked, during one of their past private conversations.

"I don't think you're a person who is inclined towards forgetfulness," Hannibal told him. "You'll have to learn to live with it. I'll help you to do that."

When he talks to Will in the dark of the night the talk is more serious than when D is awake, but there's something soothing to that too. More than once, Will drifts off to the sound of Hannibal's voice and wakes up tucked into his own bed.

Sometimes Will talks about life on the mountain, about things that he saw done to others and that were done to him.

The dead don't seem to concern Hannibal, nor any of the things Will helped his uncles to do to them. Insofar as he ever becomes upset it is on behalf of Will and D.

For Hannibal's part, he knows that Will is struggling, and he's dangerous, and he's wounded, but so far as Hannibal is concerned those aren't reasons why he should be denied care and protection.

"How many people have you killed?" Will asks him once, while they sit in front of the fire. D is asleep in bed.

"Perhaps not as many as your uncles," Hannibal tells him, "but a great many."

“I knew Soncy and Alana weren’t the only ones,” Will says, and Hannibal doesn’t correct him. “Maybe you’ll meet someone more interesting than me and D someday soon, and you’ll put us out of the way the same way you did with Alana.”

Hannibal seems to give that sincere thought, which is somehow comforting to Will, though he doesn’t think it ought to be. “No,” Hannibal says, at last. “I don’t expect that to happen.”

“Why do you kill people?? Will asks. He gestures at the room around them, the cabin that might as well be a palace compared to everything else Will has known, but that he already has figured out Hannibal considers to be barely adequate. “You don’t need to. You aren’t poor. You aren’t going hungry. You aren’t so ignorant and crazy that you don’t know any better.”

He expects Hannibal’s answer to be circuitous, another pensive speech that eventually circles back to the topic of Will himself without really answering the original question, but Hannibal surprises him.

“I find that I enjoy it,” Hannibal says. There’s a brief pause that feels almost like hesitation on Hannibal’s part, though he might just be giving Will time to process it, then he says, “Can you accept that?”

He’s watching Will very intently now. There’s a need in his eyes that Will hasn’t seen before - that wasn’t there even when Hannibal was working to convince Will to spare him a torturous death.

Pieces that Will has been struggling to put together for months suddenly click into place.

Is that all? Will wonders, stunned. Is that all he wants?

Not sex. Nothing too complicated for Will to understand. Just acceptance.

It’s too good to be true, and Will presses, “Do you want me to kill people too?”

Hannibal’s face becomes more cautious. “Do you think that is something you would like to do?”

Will thinks hard about that. He’s a little worried about disappointing Hannibal, but only a little. “I don’t know,” he says finally.

“I didn’t like Chilton,” Will continues, “and I don’t think that I’m bothered by the fact that he’s dead, but I didn’t like having to kill him. Not like that, anyway.”

“You didn’t have a choice in that. You did it to protect D.”

“I know that I don’t want it for D,” Will says, the old anxiety starting to surface. He’s surprised now, how easy it has gotten to take that anxiety out and look at it without letting it overwhelm him, and how much clarity doing so allows him.

“Never for D,” Hannibal agrees. “D wants to be normal, and he will be if we help him, and he’ll be happy that way.”

“There’s something very special about you,” Hannibal continues. “Alike calls to alike, and I think that may have been what drew me into those woods - what not only brought me to you but that compelled you to help me escape - but there’s so much more to you than even that...”

In the silence that follows, Will wonders if Hannibal is thinking about his little sister. In the firelight his eyes look strangely glassy.

“I want to see who you’ll grow to be, Will, and if the person you are is someone who could enjoy killing with me then I’ll be happy about that, but your place with me is not contingent upon becoming like me.”

Will can see it now though, more clearly than he ever has before - he can see what it would be like to be like Hannibal, so neat and clean and calmly certain, all that polish hiding away something dangerously vicious, but only towards those which he chooses to direct it.

The idea does not repel Will. It is powerfully comforting.

But what he says is, “I don’t have to decide now, do I?”

“You don’t,” Hannibal assures him. “You’re a child. You have all the time in the world to decide who you want to be.”

Chapter End Notes

This chapter marks the end of this story but not the end of the series.

Part Three is currently in the works, though because it will be a lot more plot heavy than Part Two was it might take some time to get all the moving pieces into place.

I'm @Pragnacious on twitter, for anyone who would like to follow me there. Sometimes I post additional headcanons or small bits of bonus content that doesn't end up in the fics themselves.

Thanks so much to everyone who has read, left kudos and especially commented. Yall keep me going <333

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